

New

# History of the Occult

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# History of the Occult

**K**nowledge of the occult is knowledge of the unmeasurable; the paranormal, the spiritual, and the arcane. Its origins are shrouded in mystery. History of the Occult delves deep into the past to investigate the hidden history of all things cryptic, mystic and other-worldly. Read about the lives of famous and controversial occultists, from Nostradamus, hailed by many as a prophet, to Aleister Crowley, denounced in the popular press as "the wickedest man in the world". Uncover why séances became so popular, how tarot cards could divine a person's future and the mythic origins of the occult's most influential practitioner, Hermes Trismegistus, whose spells and teachings have spread worldwide. Discover the runes, rituals and star signs behind the rise and fall of Hitler's Third Reich and immerse yourself in the mysterious world of voodoo and the famous healer who became New Orleans' most famous practitioner of the supposedly dark art. Packed with incredible illustrations and insights, this is the perfect guide for believers and sceptics alike.







# Thoth, magic, and Hermes Trismegistus

A mythical figure. An ancient prophet. The figure of Hermes Trismegistus is shrouded in mystery, but where did the founder of Hermeticism really come from?

Written by Dee Dee Chainey

The Egyptian god Thoth depicted as a baboon, now located in the Louvre (Paris)

**H**ermes Trismegistus is a mystical figure revered by many as an ancient prophet who shared his knowledge of alchemy and the occult sciences through his writings in the ancient world. To uncover the truth of this figure, we must look back to the furthest reaches of ancient Egyptian myth, to draw together the seeds of the legends that became a man.

Ritual and religion pervaded every part of life in ancient Egypt. A plethora of exotic and unusual gods and goddesses made up their diverse pantheon, worshipped as masters of the natural world. While gods were many, worship in this ancient religion focused on the

king as an intermediary between the people and the divine, yet ancient texts hidden for centuries in tombs and secreted underground have now been unearthed. These texts show how people beseeched the gods and gave offerings up to them, to ask for their blessing and help in all things. These gods ruled over natural phenomena, the astral bodies, and aspects of daily life. Each deity was seen as an unknowable force, so depicted symbolically in ancient art, with different animals, objects and signs to represent these characteristics, and convey the true nature of the god. During the Middle Kingdom golden age, Osiris the god of the dead was one of the most important deities of the pantheon. Others included Isis, who

offered help to the dead, and ruled magical healing and protection. She is linked with baking, weaving and brewing. Associated with the sky, Horus was a falcon-headed god, with the Moon as his left eye, and the Sun as his right. Linked with Horus, and too having the falcon as a symbol is Ra, a creator god, who would travel across the sky each day in his barge, carrying the Sun, at night he would travel to the underworld, hence explaining darkness to everyone who knew this myth.

From the Old Kingdom (c. 3700 to 2150 BCE) onwards, Thoth was a god of wisdom, writing and hieroglyphs, as well as



Augustine  
condemned  
Hermes Trismegistus  
for the 'idolatry and  
magic' found in  
his writings



HERCVRIVS TRIMEGISTVS

Hermes Trismegistus, pictured  
under the Greek word 'theos' or god,  
with the caduceus at his side



## Gods of writing and magic

Gods of words and writing are often also gods of magic. Up until the Greek culture pervaded Egyptian life, writing and literacy were considered secret knowledge kept only for priests and scribes. Thoth was often considered to have created writing and languages as the scribe of the gods, a responsibility shared with the goddess Seshat, seen as the 'lord of books'; he was a powerful word-smith. Many gods linked to the art of writing are also gods of magic. Odin, the chief god of Norse mythology, was a god of wisdom, healing and magic, and credited with uncovering the wisdom of the runes. He was said to practice the secret art of seiðr magic and sorcery, and was the god who uncovered the wisdom of the runes by hanging himself from the branches of the World Tree, Yggdrasil. He also pierced himself with a spear as a sacrifice, in order to call up the runes from the well of the Norr (or Fates). Runes formed the alphabet used by the Vikings for writing magical charms, once more showing a link between writing, moving between the worlds, and magic—the same powers wielded by Thoth.

The Norse Allfather, Odin, made a sacrifice to uncover the secrets of the runes from the Well of Urd.

## "Gods could be combined into a composite deity"

Knowledge and calculation, and was very much thought to maintain equilibrium within the universe. Said to stand at the side of Ra's solar barge as it travelled across the sky, his wife Maat stood on the opposing side. Thoth played an important role in Egyptian mythology, and while his worship was most prominent in the city of Khemenu (called Hermopolis by the Greeks, the City of Hermes or the City of the Sun God), he was worshipped in many areas of Egypt. The figure of Thoth developed greatly over time, and he later became a mediator between the deities, overseeing battles between good and evil, as well as becoming associated with magic, religion, philosophy and science, and was credited with giving movement to the astral bodies.

The role of the gods in ancient Egypt differs somewhat to gods in other traditions. The Egyptians did not just tell stories to explain the world, but expressed their views of the reality through the relationship between divine forces and how they interact, enter the gods. Each deity represented an area of divinity or force, rather than being seen as individual entities in the same way as people. Gods could be combined into a composite deity, becoming an amalgam of forces and symbolism. Sometimes one god was even said to exist within another deity, when one deity displayed the tendencies of another god, or took on a similar role. Often the gods would be grouped by shared traits, although others combined to highlight how some forces opposed others. One example of this is Amun—the invisible all-pervading creator—being combined with Ra—the god of the Sun and source of all its power and energy—to create Amun-Ra, who bridged both of these aspects. Thoth is linked to the Moon, and one specific aspect of himself is the moon god Iah Djehuty; he is sometimes depicted with a

Hermopolis, the 'City of Hermes', once called Khemenu by the Egyptians, was a center of worship of both Thoth and Hermes

crescent moon and lunar disk on his head because of this association. In this form, he appears as a man with the head of an ibis, with a focus of commanding times and seasons. He takes the head of a baboon when his focus is equilibrium and balance, as the god Aân. As Sheps, he takes the head of a hawk, as Mendes the head of a bull. When depicted in more general terms, he takes the form of an ibis entirely. He is seen as a self-created god, who calculated the creation of the heavens, and indeed as the tongue and very heart of Ra, directing the solar barge across the skies, giving Ra mental reasoning and the speech with which to enact his will.

By the 12th century BCE, Egypt had faced centuries of unrest and battle against the Hittites, and political chaos ensued. It never truly regained its strength. A wave of Hellenisation reached the shores of Egypt by the end of the 4th century BCE, after the conquest of Alexander the Great. The Egyptian people resisted as Ptolemy, a Macedonian Greek general, was instated as king, modelling himself on the Egyptian pharaohs of old. The new Greek ideals entering the country after the conquest had a profound impact on Egyptian religious life. King Ptolemy I introduced the worship of new gods in order to

unify the two opposing traditions of the Egyptian people and their Greek rulers, called interpretatio graeca. Greek gods and myths were equated with those of other religions as an easy way to understand the invading culture. This was easily accepted by the Egyptians, who were already used to combining their deities as one. The Egyptian Osiris and

Apis grew into the new 'Serapis', a figure joining Greek appearance and Egyptian religious ideas. This god was used as a poster-boy figure for this Greek integration, as the king took a pre-existing belief and capitalized on it, morphing the god into an amalgam of the two, and spreading this worship throughout Egypt for his own ends. The ancient Egyptian god Thoth did not escape this fate, as he was too a victim of this attempt at

One of the roles of Thoth was as a secretary to Ra in the underworld



integration. Thoth became associated with the Greek god Hermes, as the two ruled over similar forces in the universe.

Hermes was the Greek god of travellers, doorways, boundaries and their transgression, as well as herds, sleep and gymnastics, yet he is most famously known for being an emissary and messenger of the gods. Thoth has also been called a messenger; while some downplay this role and focus on his aspect as a scribe, it is understandable why some would equate the concepts of messenger and acting as an intermediary, particularly with both figures grounded in diplomacy and equilibrium. Hermes is usually depicted with a cap, winged boots, a kerykeion, caduceus or herald's staff as a symbol of peace, often wearing a robe or cape, only later developing into the naked youth we know today. Strangely, Hermes was also known for magic, as

his helmet was said to conceal him, and it was he who gave a magical plant to the Odysseus to protect him from Circe. In the Hellenistic period, after the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BCE, Hermes grew in popularity, and his feats became embellished and even more celebrated. Some have suggested that, as emissary and messenger, the god was viewed as able to mediate between worlds, the seen and unseen, and because of this his sphere of influence might have extended to divination and magic—like the Egyptian god Thoth.

Soon, the two gods had been completely conflated through the interpretatio graeca, and seen as one god. By the mid 1st century CE, Thoth was often referred to as 'Thrice Great', stemming from the Egyptian idea of composite deities with many aspects. While the exact meaning of 'Thrice Great' is still unknown, we can understand Thoth's importance as the

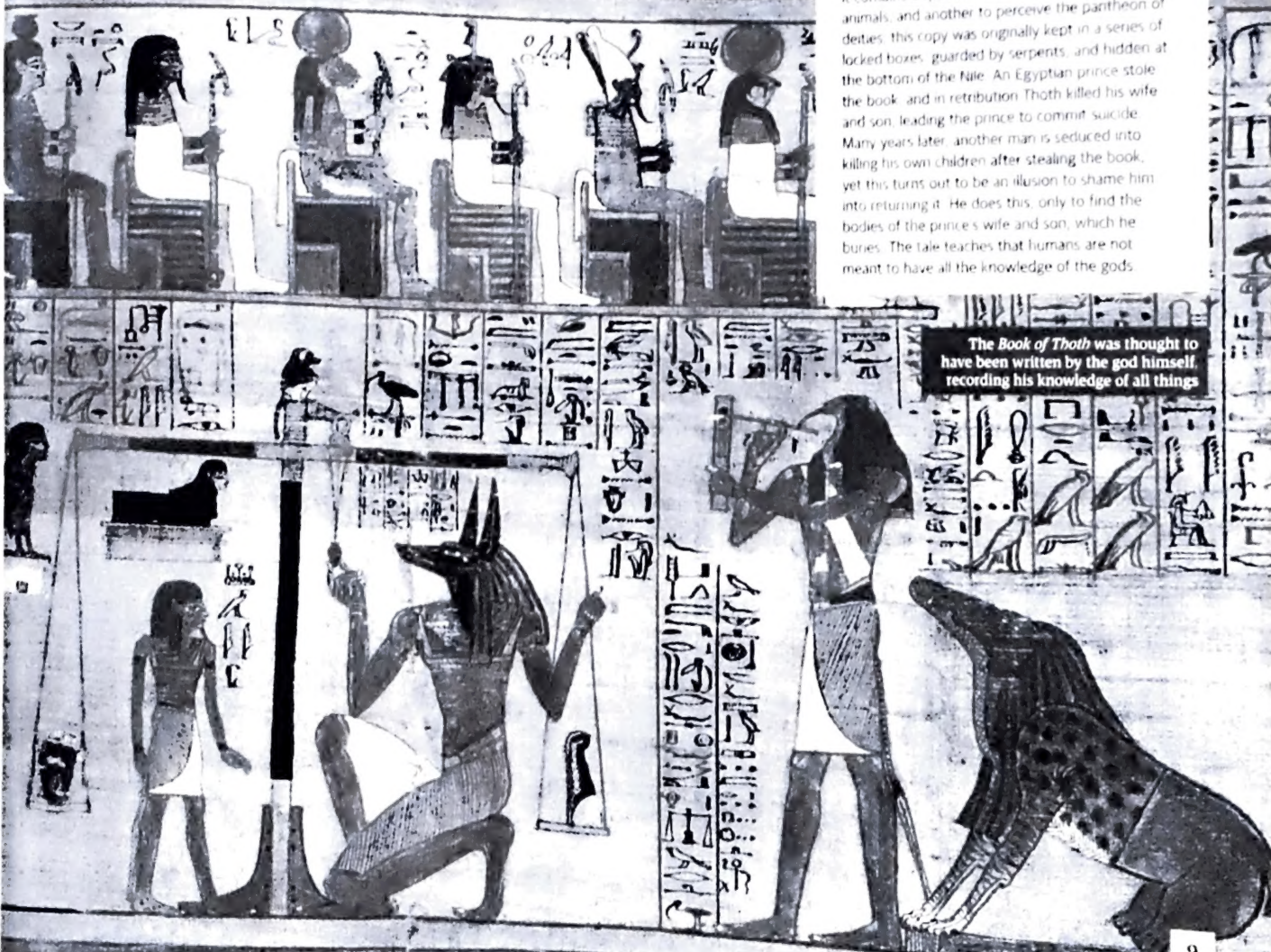
In the Egyptian creation myth, Thoth adds five days to the year, allowing Geb and Nut to procreate, and birth more gods

## The mysterious Book of Thoth

The *Book of Thoth* was said to have been written by the god himself. The book is thought to have actually been a collection of texts, 42 books, in six categories, that were said to contain all of the philosophical knowledge of the Egyptian people. The work is referred to by Clement of Alexandria at the end of the second century CE, who attributes the works to Hermes. The books were thought to have been translated into Greek, and updated with Greek ideals. It is said that books covered the laws, deities and priestly instruction; instructions for how to serve the gods; knowledge of the geography of the world and writing; astrology and astronomy; religious compositions; and, finally, knowledge of medicine. While some have tried to include the *Book of the Dead* as part of the *Book of Thoth*, this was never accepted by the majority since he is only credited with writing part of it.

An account of a fictional *Book of Thoth* appears in the Ptolemaic period, and states that it contains a spell to understand the language of animals, and another to perceive the pantheon of deities; this copy was originally kept in a series of locked boxes, guarded by serpents, and hidden at the bottom of the Nile. An Egyptian prince stole the book, and in retribution Thoth killed his wife and son, leading the prince to commit suicide. Many years later, another man is seduced into killing his own children after stealing the book, yet this turns out to be an illusion to shame him into returning it. He does this, only to find the bodies of the prince's wife and son, which he buries. The tale teaches that humans are not meant to have all the knowledge of the gods.

The *Book of Thoth* was thought to have been written by the god himself, recording his knowledge of all things





# Meet the gods of Egypt

Almost 1,500 deities are known by name and many of them combine with each other and share characteristics. Here are some of the most important

To the Egyptians, writing was sacred as it gave reliability, and enabled all knowledge of the world to be recorded



## Ra

### God of the Sun

Ra was Egypt's most important Sun god, also known as Khepri when rising, Atum when setting and the Aten as the solar disc. As the main creator deity, Ra also produced twin gods Shu and Tefnut.



## Geb

### God of the Earth

As the grandson of Ra and the son of Shu and Tefnut, green-skinned Geb represented the Earth and was usually shown reclining, stretched out beneath his sister-wife Nut.



## Isis

### Goddess of motherhood and magic

The daughter of Geb and Nut, Isis was the perfect mother who eventually became Egypt's most important deity, 'more clever than a million gods' and 'more powerful than 1,000 soldiers'.



## Osiris

### God of resurrection and fertility

Isis's brother-husband Osiris was killed by his brother Seth, only to be resurrected by Isis to become Lord of the Underworld and the god of new life and fertility.



## Horus

### God of Kingship

When his father Osiris became Lord of the Underworld, Horus succeeded him as king on Earth, and became the god with whom every human pharaoh was then identified.



## Seth

### God of storms and chaos

Represented as a composite mythical creature, Seth was a turbulent god who killed his brother Osiris, only to be defeated by Osiris's son and avenger Horus, helped by Isis.



## Nephthys

### Goddess of protection

As fourth child of Geb and Nut, Nephthys was partnered with her brother Seth, but most often accompanied her sister Isis as twin protectors of the king and of the dead.



## The animal cults of ancient Egypt

The Egyptians greatly respected the natural world, particularly animals whose spirits were worshipped as divine. With Egypt's earliest known art representing animals alongside humans, various creatures were placed in human burials as early as c. 4000 BCE, and the relationship was a fundamental part of Egypt's evolving religion. Gods could be portrayed entirely as an animal, or in human (anthropomorphic) form

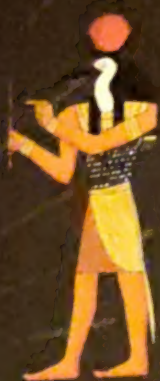
with an animal's head, as imitated by masked priests. Many deities also had a sacred creature, which was worshipped in life then mummified at death.

The most important of these was the Apis Bull of Memphis. Believed to house the soul of the creator god Ptah when alive, it was then worshipped as the underworld god Osiris after its death when the next bull was selected to continue the cycle. Other sacred

bulls and cows were worshipped elsewhere in Egypt, with other animal cults including the sacred crocodiles of Sobek, representing the power of the king, and the sacred rams of the creator god Khnum. There were also the ibis and baboons representing the god Thoth, and the cats sacred to the feline deity Bastet. Such creatures were mummified in their millions as physical manifestations of the divine and symbols of Egypt's devotion to its creatures.



**Ptah**  
God of creation and craftsmen  
Ptah was a creator god and patron of craftsmen whose temple at Memphis, known as the 'House of Ptah's Soul'—'hut-ka-ptah'—is the origin of the word 'Egypt'.



**Thoth**  
God of learning and the moon  
As the ibis-headed god of wisdom and patron of scribes, Thoth invented writing and brought knowledge to humans. His curved beak represented the crescent moon, and his main cult center was Hermopolis.



**Neith**  
Goddess of creation  
As a primeval creator deity represented by her symbol of crossed arrows and shield, warlike Neith, 'Mistress of the Bow', was worshipped at her cult center Sais in the Delta.



**Amun**  
God of Thebes  
Initially the local god of Thebes, whose name means 'the hidden one', Amun was combined with the Sun god Ra to become Amun-Ra, king of the gods and Egypt's state deity.



**Hathor**  
Goddess of love, beauty and motherhood  
Often represented as a cow or a woman with cow ears, Hathor symbolized pleasure and joy and as a nurturing deity protected both the living and the dead.



**Sekhmet**  
Goddess of destruction  
The lioness goddess Sekhmet controlled the forces of destruction and was the protector of the king in battle. Her smaller, more kindly form was Bastet the cat goddess, protector of the home.



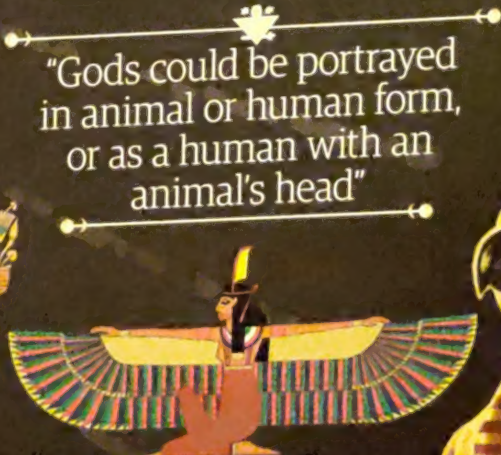
**Anubis**  
God of embalming and the dead  
The black jackal god Anubis was the guardian of cemeteries and god of embalming, who helped judge the dead before leading their souls into the afterlife.



**Taweret**  
Goddess of the home and childbirth  
Taweret was a knife-wielding hippopotamus goddess who guarded the home, a protector of women and children who was invoked during childbirth to scare away evil forces.



**Bes**  
God of the home and childbirth  
Bes was a dwarf-like god of the household who protected women and children alongside Taweret, like her carrying knives for protection, in his case he carried musical instruments for pleasure.



"Gods could be portrayed in animal or human form, or as a human with an animal's head"

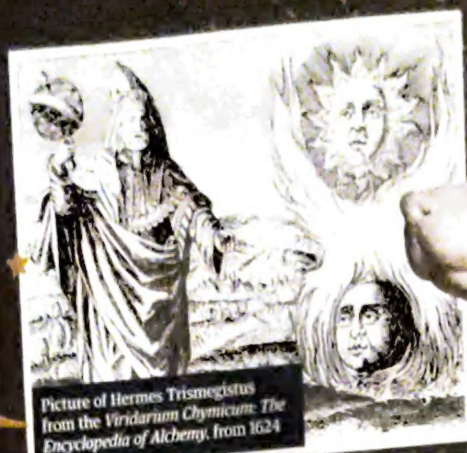
**Maat**  
Goddess of truth and justice  
As the deity who kept the universe in balance, Maat's symbol was an ostrich feather against which the hearts of the dead were weighed and judged in order to achieve eternal life.







Greek god  
Hermes, the  
son of Zeus



Hermes Trismegistus is  
depicted on the floor of the  
Cathedral of Siena in Italy

personification of the mind of god, and the god who organizes and directs all governing forces of the known universe; the veneration of this god was some of the greatest in the land, and might go some way to explaining such a grand epithet. Most attribute the first instances of this name as appearing in the writings of Athenagoras of Athens and in a fragment from Philo of Byblos, while others take this back to Egyptian cult texts from the 2nd century BCE. Through this three-fold aspect of Thoth, and his association with Hermes, the composite—and more complex—figure of Hermes Trismegistus was born. The 10th century Suda, a Byzantine encyclopaedia, explains that Hermes was given the name of Trismegistus because there is one divine nature within the trinity; we can view this in a similar way to how Christianity has the divine trilogy of God, Jesus and the Holy Ghost, who are all separate yet integral.

Alchemy was  
the study of how to  
turn one substance,  
like base metals,  
into another—for  
instance, gold

Hermes Trismegistus was patron of philosophy, alchemy, magic and astrology, and credited as the instigator of one the most mystical philosophies known to date. Historically, many considered Hermes Trismegistus to be an actual figure: a wise prophet, a contemporary of Abraham. Only one thing is for certain, the figure of Hermes Trismegistus is shrouded in mystery, yet credited with passing down sacred and ritual knowledge. Some say he wandered the lands of Egypt before even the time of Moses. Others believed that he was a contemporary of Abraham, passing on sacred knowledge to him. Others considered him one of a long line of prophets, passing on the one truth—the *prisca theologia*—from God, in the same vein as the Persian Zoroaster, and some believe he is an ancestor of the Prophet Muhammad himself.

Hermes Trismegistus was believed to be the author of countless texts conveying ancient



weekend. Many say he is the author of the 42 books previously credited to Thoth, while Plutarch mentioned a hall containing 3600 years of ancient wisdom at the Temple of Neith at Sais in the Nile Delta. Some of these texts are collectively referred to as the *Hermetica*, which detailed knowledge of magic, the universe and the mind in the form of a dialog

between a master and student. Indeed the master was Hermes Trismegistus himself. This body of work has since the heart of Hermeticism, dealing with magical plants and gemstones, astrology, talismans, surrounding spirit, with astrology and the drawing down of the stars. One of the most important of the *Hermetica* texts was the *Asclepius*, which explained how to trap demons and spirits inside statues, while *De Planetis* from the *Corpus Hermeticum* detailed the creation of the world by the 'son of god', known as the Word, reminiscent of the biblical Genesis. These texts are generally thought to originate between 100 BC and 100 CE, and can be divided into two types: those dealing with philosophy and those dealing with magic. Hermeticism focused on using magical religious practices to transcend the constraints of the physical body. These teachings became popular through the Hellenistic period, linked to Platonism and Stoicism, with an element of Jewish and Persian influences, and saw a revival with the alchemy of the Middle Ages right through to the Renaissance.

Various legends about the comings and goings of Hermes Trismegistus have been developed over the centuries. Some say that Hermes Trismegistus appeared in Islamic literature in the form of the prophet Idris, with his writing being recorded by Ikhwan al-Bihar, a secret society of Muslim philosophers translated as 'The Brethren of Purity'. Others go so far as to claim that he travelled from Egypt to visit advanced races living in outer space, and even to Heaven itself, before returning to Earth. He is also credited with building the pyramids at Giza. The Emerald Tablet sheds light on these beliefs, as it is seen as one of the foundations of Hermetic practice written by Hermes Trismegistus himself. The tablet is associated with the secret of the prima materia and the Philosopher's Stone.

Although the origin of the tablet is murky, many believe it is another example of a source credited with being older than it actually is, and in reality the first reference to it is an Arabic text dating to between the 6th and 8th centuries BCE. *The Book of Bahar*, the *Wise on the Causes*. Legend tells that the tablet was found in the arms of a corpse, seated on a golden throne under a statue of Hermes in Tyana. The tablet

was not translated into Latin until the 12th century BCE, and a translation into French appeared in the 16th century, and it was the last of a series of translations by later spiritual writers.

While the belief that the texts were written by the figure of Hermes Trismegistus were given an analysis by Isaac Newton in the 17th century, he examined the language used and concluded that these were indeed much later than believed, and could not have been written by the spiritual 'gods'. This opinion has since been challenged by many.

In conclusion, it seems that the texts attributed to the ancient pharaoh were Egyptian, Greek texts written by multiple authors from the 1st and 2nd century CE, and after incorporating beliefs and texts from much earlier Egyptian traditions linked to the god Thoth, and indeed updated to incorporate Greek ideas initially for the political aims of royal integration and the acceptance

of a new branch of rulers in Egypt. The figure of Hermes Trismegistus did indeed act as a much needed historical basis for the tradition, and drew together the disparate ideas, neatly packaging them as a coherent belief system with a central figure. While the validity of Hermes Trismegistus and his writings are highly questionable, and an absolute falsehood for most scholars, there is certainly no doubt that his influence has reached far and wide, across continents and across history, to capture the imagination of many, and create a mystical tradition that countless people still adhere to today.

Pharaoh I Soter depicted as the Pharaoh of Egypt, now in the British Museum, London



## Crowley's Thoth tarot deck

The Thoth tarot was a deck published by Ordo Templi Orientis in 1969, after both of the creators had passed away. Painted by Lady Frieda Harris, based on the mystical instructions from Aleister Crowley, and paired with his book on the deck, *The Book of Thoth*, written between 1938 and 1943. The depictions on each of the cards are inspired by various mystical systems, as well as philosophy and science, in an attempt to reinvigorate and reinterpret the traditional meanings, as is encouraged for all initiates to the Order of the Golden Dawn as part of their spiritual journey. Crowley changed many of the Major Arcana names, as well as renaming pages to princesses, and knights to princes in the Court Cards. Another major difference in the deck is that he modified the corresponding Hebrew letters and astrological associations of the cards, based on his own reading of their symbolism in line with his teaching in his *Book of the Law*. He also gave a title to each of the Minor Arcana cards. While the accompanying book is meant to act somewhat as an instruction manual, Crowley's deck is infamous for its mystic nature and inaccessibility for the uninitiated. A modified version of the deck, including two original cards by Lady Frieda Harris but rejected by Crowley, is still available from U.S. Games Systems.

The Thoth tarot deck is still incredibly popular with people today, seen to hold great divinatory wisdom





# Haruspicy

People see signs in everything, including animal entrails. The ancient Romans searched through the bodies of sacrificed animals to see what the future held...

Written by Poppy-Jay Palmer

The ancient Etruscans developed an advanced civilisation in Italy before the Roman Empire, possessing sophisticated forms of art and culture, and

it was no different when it came to divination. One practice that became popular with the ancient Etruscans was haruspicy. In fact, it was so popular that, as with art and culture, it eventually made its way to ancient Rome.

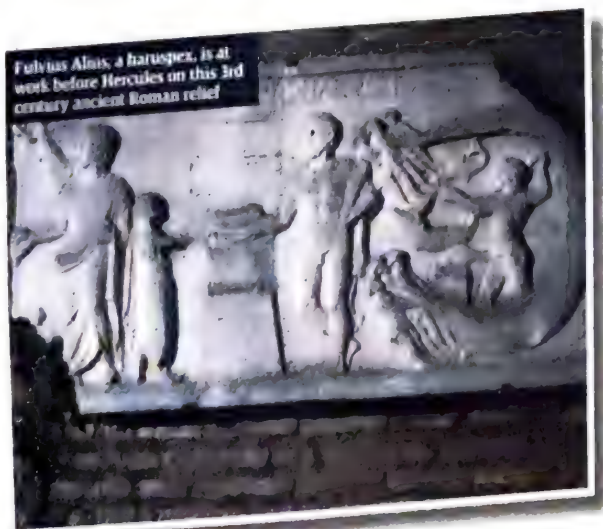
With the practice tracing all the way back to at least the third millennium BCE, a haruspex, someone trained in haruspicy, could predict the future by reading omens found in the entrails of animals like sheep and poultry. To interpret the divine, they would ritually slaughter livestock as a sacrifice, butcher it, examine the size,

shape, color and markings of the animal's internal organs, primarily the liver but also the gall bladder, heart and lungs, and then roast the meat to share in a sacred meal with celebrants. The sacrifice usually took place during ceremonies where the Sun god could influence the entrails' appearances.

Haruspices would charge people to ask a question, to which they would be able to answer 'yes' or 'no' by studying the entrails, weighing up the positive and negative omens and seeing which one prevailed. As divination was a trusted and elaborate practice,

haruspices had to undergo extremely specialized training in order to be taken seriously. A manual called the *Bārūta*, or 'Art of the Diviner', was circulated from around 600 BCE or earlier, and took up 135 clay tablets.

It's believed that Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas à Becket consulted a haruspex before an expedition against Brittany



Fulvius Atrius, a haruspex, is at work before Hercules in this 3rd century ancient Roman relief

"A haruspex, someone trained in haruspicy, could predict the future by reading omens found in the entrails of animals like sheep"

An ancient Roman haruspex inspects the entrails of a sacrificed bull in this art piece displayed at Paris' Musée Du Louvre



After the practice, which was directly derived from the Etruscan religion, was adopted by the Romans, it also became popular with both Christian apostates and pagans, and continued to be regularly used well into the Middle Ages. The Babylonians were also famous for haruspicy, which is mentioned in the Book of Ezekiel. It

For the king of the Babylon standeth at the parting of the way, at the head of the two ways, to use divination: he shaketh the arrows, and from the iniquity of the setaphim, he looketh at the liver.

In modern society, slaughtering your own livestock is not frowned upon — diviners

have been known to slaughter thousands of animals for eggs, most of which are thrown away, and examining the inside of the liver. Etruscan haruspicy used the liver of domestic animals because it was a lot more practical, and solemn than cracking an egg and presenting the findings.

Sol Invictus (the 'Unconquered Sun') was the official sun god of the later Roman Empire and a patron of Roman soldiers

Greek mythological figure Calchas is represented as a haruspex on this Etruscan mirror





# Renaissance magic

The passion for knowledge and how to use it led thinkers deep into a mysterious world where the boundaries between nature, supernature and religion were far from clear

Written by Derek Wilson

In the 15th and 16th centuries the western and near-eastern worlds were home to three major religions—Christianity, Islam and Judaism. All had their intellectual elites with their own convictions about the cosmos and man's place in it. There also existed a multi-faceted paganism, which saw the world as populated with an array of spirit beings, beneficent and malign, who constantly intervened in the lives of humans. All thinking participants in this rainbow-hued speculation had one thing in common: they all agreed that life had meaning. The scholars of these great religions might have continued to work within their own traditions were it not for a series of events in the century 1440-1540 that brought about the most far-reaching intellectual revolution in our history—a revolution that later ages came to call the 'Renaissance'.

There were three powerful factors that brought about this transformation. The first (c.1440) was the invention of a printing press that used moveable type. Before this, books had been expensive, hand-written products that could only be read in libraries or in the homes of wealthy collectors. Now that printing was a fast-growing industry, scholars and students could buy their own copies of mass-produced works and exchange their own ideas with each other.

The second event added significantly to the number of books available. In 1453 the great city of Constantinople, capital of the Eastern Christian Empire, was captured by Muslim Turks after a 53-day siege. Among the citizens who fled from this invasion were leading intellectuals who took with them several of their precious ancient texts. The boundaries of academic debate now widened to embrace both newly available religious/philosophical thinking and the re-interpretation of traditional beliefs.

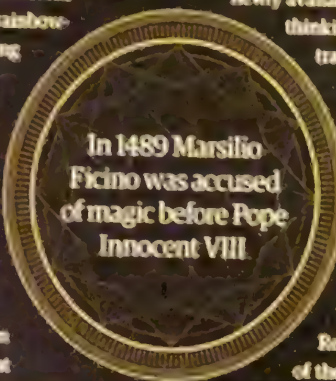
The third event was an even more radical understanding of Christian truth.

Around 1520, thinkers and preachers in various parts of Europe began to challenge various aspects of orthodox Church teaching.

This came to be known as the Reformation. The combination of these influences—and not forgetting the pagan superstition,

which was felt by people at all levels of society—produced a large array of ideas and beliefs that led to vigorous debate, widespread persecution and, eventually, to war.

The first 'factory' creating this new thinking was North Italy. Scholars working in universities such as Florence and Bologna or in the households of wealthy patrons—merchant princes, rulers of city states or senior ecclesiastics—were much involved in studying



In 1489 Marsilio  
Ficino was accused  
of magic before Pope  
Innocent VIII.



the works of classical antiquity—the great philosophers, poets and historians of Greece and Rome who were the founders of their own culture. When the refugees from Constantinople arrived they brought, as well as their own religious, poetic and historical writings, writings of classical authors, which had been long lost in the West but preserved in the East, some of them translated into Arabic.

Scholarly Jews also found themselves forced to flee their homes in these years, some from the conquering Muslims in the East and some from Spain, where a purge spearheaded by King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella led to the expulsion or forced conversion of Jews in 1492. As a result, students of the Hebrew Wisdom literature, and especially of that esoteric branch known as Kabbalah, were drawn to the Italian centers of intellectual activity and found themselves debating with their Christian and Muslim counterparts.

To advanced Renaissance thinkers it now seemed obvious that the three great religions must all owe their origins to a more fundamental source of truth and wisdom. This 'prisca theologia' was ardently sought by Renaissance scholars. It was—or so they

thought—the gateway to what the ancient Greeks called 'gnosis' (knowledge)—and also to what they labelled 'exousia' (authority/power). The two were inseparably linked, for the person who understood the nature and workings of the temporal and spiritual realms could use that knowledge in a variety of ways. Such men were magi or magicians.

Everyone in medieval society believed in magic, the ability to manipulate the forces latent in nature. The ranks of those initiated into the occult (supernatural or mystical knowledge) included the local wise woman, the herbalist, the apothecary, the alchemist, the astrologer and the necromancer. Church leaders were ardent in warning against malign magic but none doubted the reality of harnessing the forces of nature and supernature. Many clergy, for example, cast horoscopes. There was no clear distinction between theological and philosophical understanding of the workings of the universe. If God had endowed certain herbs with medicinal properties to relieve human suffering, could he not also have arranged the motions of heavenly bodies to assist in the wellbeing of mankind? The distinction between village folklore and philosophical speculation might appear to be

absolute but in reality any difference boils down to degrees of intellectual sophistication.

Let us, for the moment, restrict our debate to the profound Renaissance thinkers who were striving to frame an orderly understanding of the workings of the universe. The lead in these deliberations was taken by a group in Florence founded by Marsilio Ficino. It was known as the Platonic Academy because it took its inspiration from the followers of the 6th-century BCE Athenian philosopher Plato.

The Academicians were, however, Neoplatonists because they belonged to a long tradition of philosophers who sought to relate the teaching of the Greek master to later intellectual/spiritual developments, particularly the advent of Christianity. For Ficino and his friends an unbroken chain of gnosis stretched right back, via Plato, to the *prisca theologia*.

Neoplatonism rejected a clear-cut distinction between matter and spirit. Everything in the universe was suffused by spiritual entities, all of which interacted to control terrestrial life, the movements of the spheres and the activities of the Creator and his angelic cohorts in heaven. The branch of philosophy to which Neoplatonism belongs is called 'metaphysics', the



An alchemist works at his craft in this 17th-century painting by Adriaen van Ostade



11 12 13 14 15

The four great alchemists. From left to right: Al-Jabir, Arnold of Villanova, Rhazes and Hermes Trismegistus. Look down on workers in a laboratory.



Marsilio Ficino (first on left) from a fresco painted by Domenico Ghirlandaio



## England's most famous magus

The extraordinary life of John Dee (1527-1608/9) provides us with a vivid example of how science, philosophy and magic interacted in many Renaissance thinkers. He was one of the most brilliant students to emerge from Cambridge University. Though his studies embraced many subjects, his main interest was mathematics. For him the 'magic' of numbers provided an insight into the mind of God. He applied his skills to cartography and the provision of navigational aids for mariners. From here it was but a short step to promoting England's overseas expansion during the reign of Elizabeth I. But he also studied hermetic philosophy, astrology and alchemy. He enjoyed the patronage of the queen, for whom he cast horoscopes. Increasingly his mind turned towards the conjuration of spirits in which he was assisted by the charlatan, Edward Kelly, who cashed in on Dee's fame for his own ends. Together the two men travelled to several European courts in the 1580s seeking new patrons with their promises of providing the guidance of the spirits and the secret of turning base metals into gold. By the time Dee returned to England, having broken his relationship with Kelly, he discovered that public opinion had turned against his dabbling with 'Satanic' magic and that his laboratory had been trashed by angry neighbours. He never regained his earlier fame and eventually died in comparative poverty.

Many of Dee's prized books and instruments were stolen while he travelled Europe



Hermes Trismagistus pictured with the personifications of Orient and the Occident, from the marble floor of the Siena Cathedral

which he entitled the *Corpus Hermeticum*. This long-lost text purported to be a classical Greek collection of Greco-Egyptian wisdom dating back even further—perhaps 9,000 years—and taught by Hermes Trismagistus—'Thrice Great Hermes'. This figure was a god, worshipped by Egyptians as Thoth and by Greeks as Hermes. His teaching was supposedly relayed in various strands. He featured in Zoroastrian worship. He appeared in the Quran as a prophet. Jewish writings mentioned him as a contemporary of Moses. It is easy to see why his Renaissance rediscoverers should have associated him with the *prisca theologia*. The Hermetic writings were mystical and complex. They could

scarcely be otherwise, since they claimed to explain everything. Keith Thomas, in *Religion and the Decline of Magic* offered this summary:

*"It taught that by mystical regeneration it was possible for man to regain dominion over nature which he had lost at the Fall [in the Garden of Eden]. Its astrological and alchemical lore helped to create an intellectual environment sympathetic to every kind of mystical and magical activity."*

It was all incredibly mysterious and impressive and compelling. The only problem was that the *Corpus Hermeticum* was a fraud. That is to say that, while elements of it went back to classical times, the compendium was written no earlier

than 300 CE. This was demonstrated in 1614 by Genevan scholar, Isaac Casaubon, regarded by many contemporaries as the most brilliant Greek scholar of the age.

Away from the rarified atmosphere of philosophical debate, ordinary mortals needed help in coping with the problems of everyday existence. For most people life was, by modern European standards, short and uncomfortable. Average life expectancy was about 35. Most people dwelt in what we would think of as squalid conditions. Disease was rife. For example, Renaissance Europe had not yet fully recovered from the Black Death, which had run amok in the mid-14th century and wiped out between a third and a half of the population. Poverty was rife and many families lived a precarious existence on the subsistence level. They needed all the help they could get for their own wellbeing and that of their animals and their crops. No less than the magi, untutored folk believed that the material world was suffused with the spiritual and when they were in need they turned to the 'experts' in their midst who could invoke the aid of higher powers. There were two sources of supernatural power. One was accessed via the Church. The other was available from the practitioners of folk religion.

The most regular 'magic' practiced by parish priests was the mass, a service during which the officiant took bread and wine, consecrated them and, by so doing, 'transubstantiated' them into the actual body and blood of Christ. This 'priestly miracle' was the focus of religious life, and masses were performed constantly. For many people the mass elements themselves came to be regarded as possessing holy power. Some worshippers were known to take the consecrated bread away from church, instead of eating it, to use as a charm. The Church disapproved of this but, at the same time

"The mass elements themselves came to be regarded as possessing holy power"





...the more common approach by  
...of the saints' relics - items  
...A relic once worn by one of the saints  
...could be used to cure a wide variety of ailments  
...of such relics as a  
...fragment of wood from the  
...the first books published by  
...poet William Caxton was a  
...1484, an earlier  
...describing miracles wrought by  
...It recorded how a whole city  
...by the cloth spread  
...of Agatha A  
...that looms over  
...and spewed a river of fire and  
...towards the city. Then crowds of  
...the saint's tomb  
...the path of the fire and hung it  
...the stream of lava  
...and did not advance a foot farther.

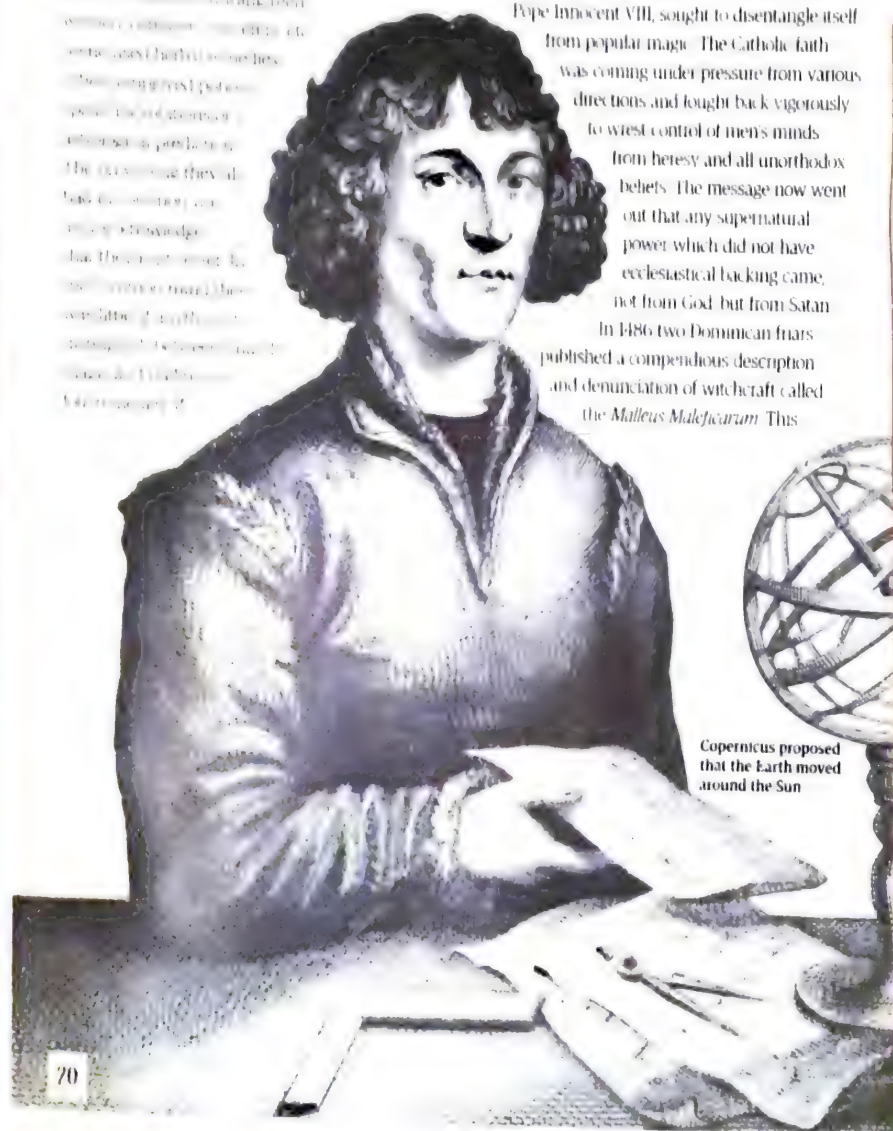
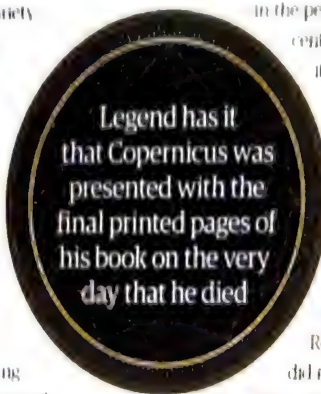
Folk religion took on a confusing variety of  
forms. Popular magic practitioners were known as  
witches, wizards, sorcerers, etc.  
...of herbs, etc.  
...of herbs, etc.  
...of herbs, etc.  
...of herbs, etc.  
...of herbs, etc.  
...of herbs, etc.  
...of herbs, etc.  
...of herbs, etc.  
...of herbs, etc.

your child was sick or your crops spoiled if you  
were quarrelling or angry with your neighbour if you  
wanted to know how a business venture would turn  
out or were desperately in need of a son to inherit  
your property, there were a variety  
of specialists at your disposal.  
The help you received might  
contain both religious and  
naturalistic elements, such  
as wearing a specific charm  
and then repeating mystic  
incantations. In the 1500s a  
Somerset cunning woman  
Joan Tyrry prescribed herbs  
for treating a bewitched  
person but insisted that they  
should be gathered while reciting  
five Paternosters, five Ave Marias and  
a Creed.

But things were changing drastically as  
Renaissance and, then, Reformation thinking  
spread throughout Europe. The church, led by  
Pope Innocent VIII, sought to disentangle itself  
from popular magic. The Catholic faith  
was coming under pressure from various  
directions and fought back vigorously  
to wrest control of men's minds  
from heresy and all unorthodox  
beliefs. The message now went  
out that any supernatural  
power which did not have  
ecclesiastical backing came  
not from God, but from Satan.  
In 1486 two Dominican friars  
published a compendious description  
and denunciation of witchcraft called  
the *Malleus Maleficarum*. This

notorious book asserted that all practitioners of  
folk religion had sold their souls and laid  
rules for interrogation, conviction and punishment  
of suspects. In fact, it did not become  
the persecutors' armoury for a  
century. Its importance lies  
in what it reveals about the intellectual  
climate of the time.

A rising tide of scepticism  
Europe was threatened  
into the foundations of  
medieval Church and  
People questioned the  
standards of its representative  
Renaissance thinkers like  
did not cease to be devout  
but their speculations about the  
of Christianity and its connection with the  
Jewish thought challenged official teaching  
grassroots the spread of literacy and the



Copernicus proposed  
that the Earth moved  
around the Sun





Instead of cautiously welcoming the new thinking and engaging in debate with the



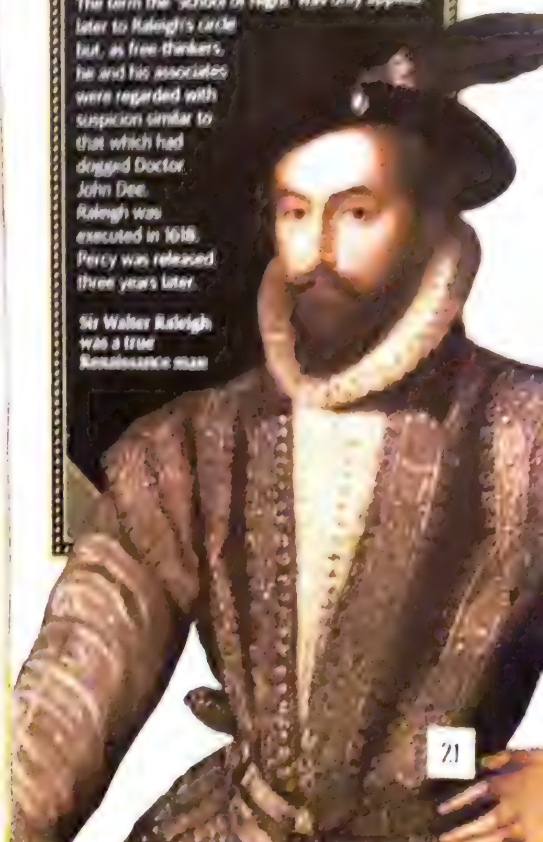
A scene from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, one of the more magical plays from Shakespeare.



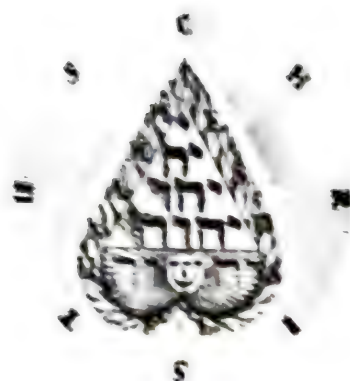
This illustration depicts a Copernican system of the universe and demonstrates night and day.

## The School of Night

One of the strangest 'academies' where amateur scholars debated in secret knowledge and were widely suspected of magical practices was held in a prison, and not any prison. This established salon met in the Tower of London. Soon after the accession of James I in 1603, Queen Elizabeth's favourite, Sir Walter Raleigh (1553-1618), was arrested on suspicion of being involved in a plot against the new king. Though found guilty, his life was spared and he was lodged in the Tower. Two years later, Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland (1564-1632) was accused of complicity in the Gunpowder Plot and suffered the same fate. The conditions of their imprisonment were far from hard. They had spacious quarters, kept servants and received visitors. They also devoted themselves to the study of philosophy, theology and astrology, being joined by scholars such as Thomas Harriot (1561-1621), the inventor of navigational instruments and an astronomical telescope. Raleigh wrote *A History of the World*, Percy amassed a large library and equipped a laboratory for carrying out alchemical experiments. All this, plus the personal reputations of the two men and the enmity of King James (who was paranoid about witchcraft) was enough to engender Puritan suspicions of probing forbidden knowledge. They were accused of atheism (in those days only scarcely less reprehensible than treason) and Percy was widely known as the 'Wizard Earl'. The term 'School of Night' was only applied later to Raleigh's circle but, as free thinkers, he and his associates were regarded with suspicion similar to that which had dogged Doctor John Dee. Raleigh was executed in 1618. Percy was released three years later.







# Kabbalah

Drawing upon Judaism, Kabbalah is a mystical tradition that centers on receiving knowledge of God and guidance for everyday living

— — — — — Written by David Crookes — — — — —

**T**hink of the mystical religion Kabbalah and many will immediately picture the singer Madonna. As the 11th number of celebrities to embrace its ancient wisdom, in recent years she has sought to study and understand Kabbalah's deep teachings, often in the face of great criticism. Through her efforts, people have learned of some aspects of the religion, not least the strand of red string bracelet that many contemporary followers wear to ward off the evil eye.

But Kabbalah is no celebrity fad, nor is it by any means a newfangled religion. It's the theology of the Jewish people and the spiritual study of unseen laws governing the universe from the perspective of Judaism. Those who follow it have done so because they believe it gives them a great understanding into the workings and the structure of the human soul. Indeed, its origins are said to stretch back to the Holy Scriptures, to Adam, the first man.

According to Kabbalistic tradition, Adam was both the spiritual and biological ancestor of humans and he was also androgynous. He was split into two halves after eating from the tree of

knowledge of good and evil but then received his teachings for mankind through the Archangel Raziel, the Keeper of Secrets. Kabbalists believe man and woman must merge in marriage to form a full soul. More than that, tradition teaches the souls of all humans combine to form one soul, which is that of Adam.

Abraham also figures highly in Kabbalah, as he does in Judaism as a whole (he's seen as the founding father of the Covenant). Traditional Kabbalists believe Abraham, who lived around 1700 BCE, received the truth of Kabbalah and wrote the *Sefer Yetzirah*, the earliest extant book on Jewish esotericism and the first Kabbalistic text. For that reason, it has become a primary source for students of Kabbalah and it also reinforces Abraham's view that God is One.

Such beliefs were cemented by the prophet and teacher Moses who ascended Mount Sinai and received the Commandments from God along with the Oral Torah. The latter contained the laws, statutes and legal interpretations that had not been noted in the Written Torah (the Five Books of Moses) and the Kabbalistic truths they contained paved a spiritual level of existence that explored the nature of the soul. Bodies were seen



Even though Kabbalists say that humankind's greatest pleasure is to know God, their view is that knowledge of God is impossible



"Kabbalah is the spiritual study of the laws governing the universe"

This a fragment of the Zohar, a collection of commentaries on the Torah which forms a primary book for Kabbalists



comparative knowledge for the fundamental knowledge of the universe, the human mind and the human body.

For the Jews, knowledge was passed down through the generations, even though they had suffered from oppression throughout the Roman Empire. From about 100 BC, a secret school of mysticism, Merkabah mysticism, had emerged as a school of early Jewish mysticism and the mystic focused on the role of the soul in the Hebrew Bible. The first chapters centered on prophet Elijah, a secret rite to the heavens, a divine character. Mystics sought to interpret the meaning of the vision and what it said and revealed about God.

The idea manifested itself in a study called *marash merkabah*, which taught that the path to God was strewn with obstacles and encouraged Jews to train their minds in order to connect on an emotional as well as physical level. Meanwhile, *marash bereshit* emerged as a mystical understanding of verses in the book of Genesis.

Kabbalists say that God is constantly creating the world through ten fundamental forces called the *sefirot*.

It interpreted the first chapters of the Bible of upper and lower worlds, physical, celestial and human. Kabbalists began to study the Bible more deeply to question and probe more deeply to look beyond the surface of what was presented to them.

Kabbalah, however, did not reach maturity until the 13th century, and it was from this point in time that the idea truly spread through the Jewish community. The most famous work of Kabbalah, the *Sefer ha-Tzimra*, written by the Spanish Kabbalist Moses de Leon, who lived in the 13th century, was a collection of the words of Kabbalah from the 12th century.

The 13th century, with the Talmud, the book of Jewish law, the *Shema*, and the *Shema*, which included the *marash merkabah* and *marash bereshit*, it ended up standing alongside both the Talmud and the Torah as important pillars of the wisdom writing of the Children of Israel in Kabbalah tradition.

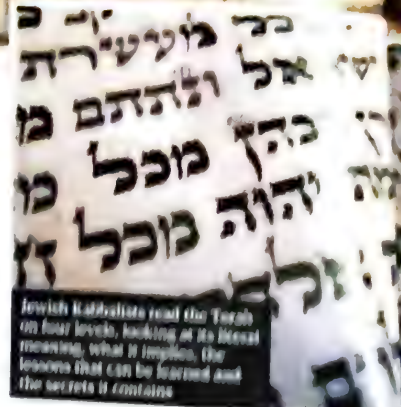
But what was it? The *Zohar* was a series of books that commented on the mystical aspect of the Torah, exploring the nature of God and the human soul, as well as good and evil. It looked at the structure of the universe, its origins, and it became vitally important for students. The *Zohar* was also greatly significant for the Jews, badly affected by the Alhambra Decree of 1492, which saw them forced to convert to Christianity or be expelled from the Kingdoms of Castile and Aragon on the orders of the papal Catholic monarch of Spain.

It was, Kabbalah, contemporary however, that those seeking to understand had to be aged over 40. This was due to the first major written collection of the Oral Torah, the Mishnah, speaking of 40 as being the best age for understanding the Torah of the Father.

It was also preferable for students to be married, which again was seen as a sign of maturity and experience. Then came a debate too over who actually wrote the *Zohar*, with a debate since claiming it to be the work of Rabbi Moses de Leon. Regardless, Judaism became a more inner experience for many.

Much of that was down to Jewish mystic Rabbi Isaac Luria, who transformed the study, before his death in 1572. Key to his interpretation was that only the understanding that only God existed before the universe, and that he began the process

The Tree of Life with its ten spheres, as presented in the *Sefer Yetzirah*, which is the earliest extant book on Jewish mysticism.



Jewish Kabbalists read the Torah on four levels, looking at its literal meaning, what it implies, the lessons that can be learned and the secrets it contains.

The Kabbalah Centre seeks to openly teach traditional Jewish Kabbalah today. It was founded by Philip Berg in 1965.



German occult writer Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa





Ezekiel's Vision, by Italian painter Raphael

of creation by contracting his infinite light to make room for a finite, pluralistic world. This work was passed on thanks to Rabbi Chaim Vital who put the teachings down in writing.

From that emerged the ten sefirot that made up the Kabbalah Tree of Life (that is, the spiritual attributes in which The Infinite God is revealed including primary will, wisdom, understanding, judgement, lovingkindness, might, beauty, glory, victory, connection, sovereignty and the Divine Presence). Such teachings were later adapted by occultist and western esoteric movements, with the Renaissance seeing Christian Kabbalah emerge thanks to a growing appetite for interpreting Christianity from a mystical point of view.

Christian Kabbalah reinterpreted the doctrine of Jewish Kabbalah by linking the atonement and resurrection of Jesus Christ to the ten sefirot. In the Christian Kabbalah's Tree of Life, the three topmost spheres became connected to the Trinity, the rest concerning themselves with Earth. Hermetic Qabalah then arose from a desire to find proof of Christian



An ultra Orthodox Jewish man watches a bonfire during the holiday of Lag B Omer

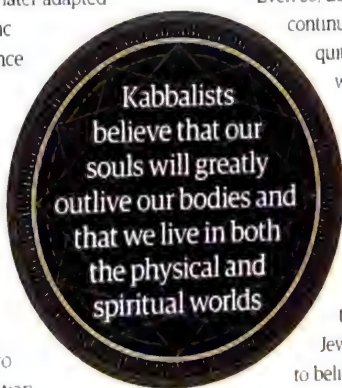
doctrine in Hebrew mysticism. It not only drew upon Kabbalah but also pagan religions, western astrology, gnosticism, neoplatonism, tantra and alchemy. By combining different beliefs and thoughts, it promoted a syncretic world view.

Although Hermeticists saw Qabalah's origins in classic Greece rather than Jewish mysticism, Kabbalah found its way into Hermetic tradition from the 15th century. Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa wrote *Three Books of Occult Philosophy* which explored the beliefs of Western Esotericism. It looked at the subjects of ritual magic, spells, ceremonial procedures and Kabbalah among others and approached them from the perspective of a scholar.

Hermetic Qabalah's emphasis was on the power of a magician to make ever so slight alterations in the higher realm, and the cards that made up Tarot replaced the ten sefirot in the Tree of Life. Orphism and Egyptian mythology were added during the 17th century and its influence grew among non-Jewish scholars. They felt it could uncover hidden connections since they believed anything would take the place of the ten spheres and 22 paths of the Tree of Life. It posits that the universe is best understood by numbers and so draws upon the work of Pythagoras.

Even so, Luna's initial influence continues to this day (and that's quite aside from Madonna writing a song called *Isaac* in 2005 which many believed was about him). The Kabbalah Centre led by Rabbi Philip Berg is the most influential and it is dedicated to bringing the wisdom of the religion to the world. Jewish Kabbalists continue to believe that they are able to repair the damage between the upper

and lower worlds by detaching the divine light connecting good with evil and that, by observing the commandments, it will lead people from exile to redemption.



## Syncretism

Hermetic Qabalah combined diverse beliefs and blended practices of various schools of thought. In sharing concepts with Jewish Kabbalah and drawing on alchemy, pagan religions, Western astrology, gnosticism and more, it created a new system and was a prime example of what is termed religious syncretism.

Detractors, including Orthodox Christians, say syncretism relies not on the Scriptures but on the whim of humans, drawing on influences affecting a culture. They say it makes a religion illegitimate, but there's a compelling argument that all religions are syncretic to some degree. Many pagan symbols, for example, were adopted by Christianity between the second and fourth centuries.

Indeed, the religion of Judaism has also arguably absorbed outside religious influences (Jewish fundamentalists, however, say it has not). Meanwhile, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, an Italian Renaissance nobleman and philosopher, founded the tradition of Christian Kabbalah through a syncretic view of Kabbalah, Hermeticism, Aristotelianism, Platonism and Neoplatonism.

Other syncretistic movements include gnosticism which blends aspects of Oriental mystery religions, the dualistic religion founded in the third century, Manichaeism, and Sikhism which draws on elements of Hinduism and Islam. Aside from religion, it should be noted that syncretism is also common in other expressions of culture, including literature and music.

The 17th-century printmaker Stephan Michelspacher published *Cabala, Spiegel der Kunst und Natur: in Alchymia* in 1615.







# Nostradamus

One of the most infamous oracles of all time, was Nostradamus a divine prophet or a fraud?

— — — — — Written by Willow Winsham — — — — —

**H**ailed recently as the author of the Gospel of Doom for the modern age, Michel de Nostradamus – or Nostradamus as he is more commonly known – has had a chequered reputation over the centuries. Born in the French town of Saint Remy-de Provence as 1503 came to a close, Nostradamus was one of at least nine children born to a notary father and a mother from who he could claim a family history in medicine. Little could they have suspected, however, that his name would become synonymous with mayhem and catastrophe both during his lifetime and beyond.

Although the details of his life are often disputed it is generally assumed that Nostradamus began his professional life at the University of Avignon, although this was brought to an abrupt end in 1521 due to the spread of plague to the city. This opened up new horizons for the young man, and, if reports are to be believed, Nostradamus did not waste the time that followed, spending eight years researching herbal remedies as he roamed the countryside. This stood him in good stead for working as an apothecary, a vocation that he took to keenly for several years, providing cures and tinctures for those who came to him in his self-imposed exile.

In 1529, he decided to try again at the university route, and enrolled to study for a doctorate in medicine at the University of Montpellier. This was also to be short-lived, as he was asked to leave when

not only his previous trade as an apothecary was discovered (which was strictly against the rules of the university) but also rumours abounded that he had been speaking out against the medical profession. This lack of formal training did not, however, greatly harm his prospects. In 1531, Nostradamus moved to Agen, married and had two children. Following the death of his wife and children, he continued on with his previous travels. It was during this time that his reputation as a healer of plague was established (although there is little evidence that his attempted cures, in either Marseille or his native Salon de Provence were successful) before in 1547 he settled once again in his hometown. Here, Nostradamus married for the second and final time, his new wife a widow of wealth who bore him six children during their time together.

Nostradamus's first official dabbling with the occult and connected subjects came in the mid 1500s, when he produced the first of a long run of annual almanacs of predictions and weather forecasts, capitalising on the popularity of this new craze. Nostradamus's work catapulted him into the limelight, and he soon found himself catering for the prestigious, building up a client base that prized his ability to produce personalized predictions. Despite

## DEFINING MOMENT

### Launched into print

It was through the publication of his annual almanacs that Nostradamus made a name for himself and rose to prominence in the world of prediction and prophecy for which he became so famous, both in his own time and in the centuries since. In total, the yearly almanacs contained nearly 6,500 prophecies, proving immensely popular at the time of publication and paving the way to his later work on *The Prophecies*.

1550





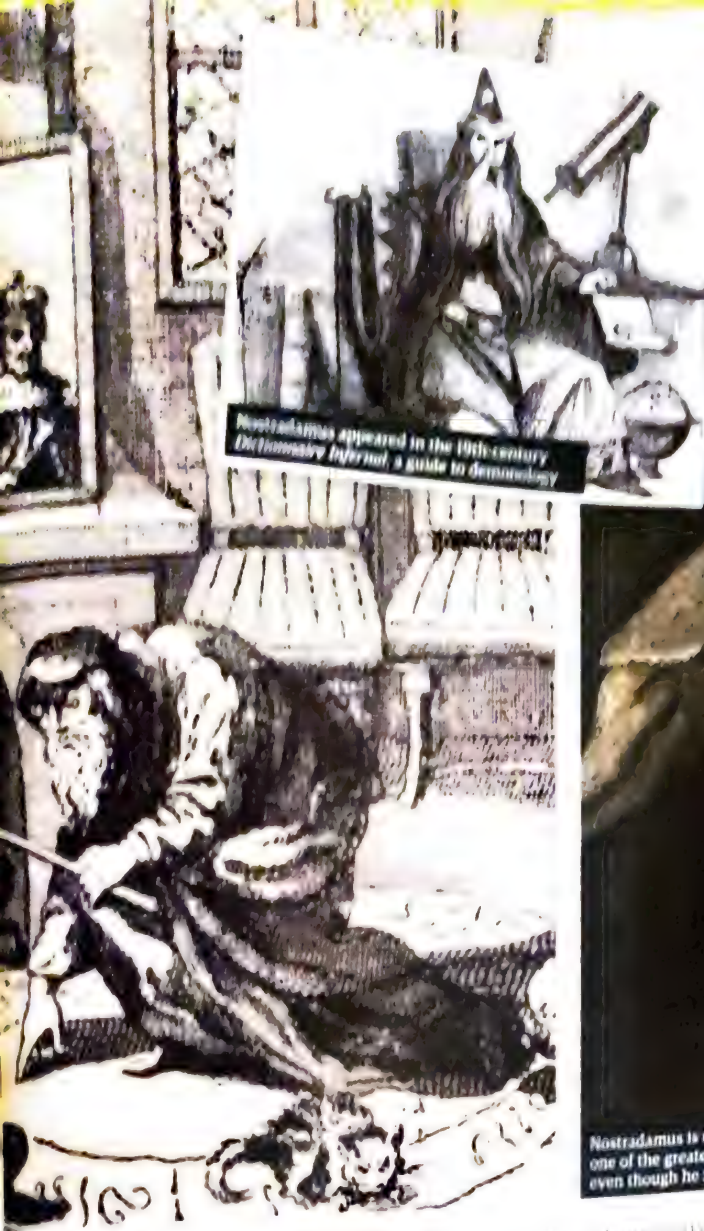
Nostradamus's work catapulted him into the limelight, and he soon found himself catering for the wealthy and prestigious

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Nostradamus appeared in the 16th-century *Dictionary Infernal*, a guide to demonology



Nostradamus is often credited with being one of the greatest prophets of all time, even though he refuted the title

they are mentioned they are used in the most general terms, allow a reader to interpret his words according to their own beliefs and agenda. Indeed, one of the greatest criticisms of the writings of Nostradamus, both from his contemporaries and modern readers, is the general feeling of confusion due to the vagueness and lack of clarity, with more than one client complaining that they could not understand a word that had been written for them. This has been further hindered by the fact that no two editions or even copies in some cases of the quatrains are the same, both printing methods and the translation process have compounded the often impenetrable nature of his works. Although heralded as a prophet, Nostradamus did not fit the image of a man visited by god to bring his word to the world, and in fact it was not

a term he wanted to be associated with. He actually refuted the claim on at least one occasion in print. The label of prophet ascribed to him by his supporters, much like that of doctor, which was used of him on several occasions despite the fact he had never achieved a degree in medicine, did more to complicate his status than hinder it, and it would have been a much less worldly man than Nostradamus, who could have spurned the benefits from such an association.

It has been said that Nostradamus worried for his reputation and even his life on occasion, some sources maintain that he feared the might and power of the

Inquisition itself, although this has since been disputed by historians, as it was religious differences rather than any occult belief or practice that led to his troubled relationship with the Church in Agen in 1538. There have also been several practices

attributed to him, including the use of a crystal ball and a magic lamp, and the use of a magic ring. However, these are all based on 19th-century accounts, and there is no evidence in historical sources, and it is not being passed on from ever-evolving myth that Nostradamus used such powers. There is also little evidence of any secret adherence to Protestantism, and his secret adherence to Protestantism and his secret adherence towards the Catholic Church, and his secret adherence by Catholic leaders such as Catherine de Medici, his client base being drawn from a variety of Protestant and Catholic background.

By the mid-1560s, the elderly Nostradamus was not in good health, suffering from a variety of ailments and dropsy. Perhaps sensing the end was near, he set his affairs in order, providing for his wife to live comfortably in the event she should become widowed, also leaving provision for his children after his death. This was not done a moment too soon, on the night of 1 July 1566, according to legend, Nostradamus went to bed with the chilling prediction to his secretary that he would not be alive come morning. True to his word, he was discovered dead the next day exactly as he had predicted.

## DEFINING MOMENT

### End of Days

After his death, Nostradamus's reputation and reach continued to grow. The powers and pronouncements attributed to him have reached beyond the grave, including the (misinterpreted) assertion that the world would end in 2012. Nostradamus has been credited with predicting many historical events, and the legend lives on in reprintings of his works and more than 2,000 commentaries to date.

1566



# Enlightenment and occultism

Enlightenment was not the triumph of rationality  
over religion and superstition

Written by Derek Wilson

**N**ot until 1863 did the word 'Enlightenment' come into being to describe certain 18th-century philosophical developments. Moreover, it was originally a term of disapprobation, implying 'shallow and pretentious intellectualism'. The relationship between religion, occultism and science was much more complex than the supposed banishing of all other forms of traditional knowledge and belief by empiricism (i.e. what can be proved by observation and calculations). For example, Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727), the greatest scientific genius before Einstein, wrote more extensively about the Second Coming of Christ than he did about gravity; and Robert Boyle (1629-1691), the 'father of modern chemistry', left money in his will for 'annual lectures to be delivered for the defense of Christianity against atheism and other "errors"'. We also need to bear in mind that the major intellectual developments of the period from the early 17th to the late 18th centuries were the result not only of remarkably gifted thinkers, but also of major politico-religious movements in what was a very troubled period of European history. That period began with the Thirty Years' War on the Continent and the

Civil War in Britain. It included religious revival movements on both sides of the Atlantic. It ended with the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars.

Let us begin in 1633 with the incident often represented as the beginning of the clash between 'religion and science', the papal condemnation of Galileo Galilei (1564-1642). The

Italian had long since embraced

Copernicus's heliocentric theory—that the Earth moves round the sun. Copernicus had demonstrated this mathematically, but Galileo had confirmed it by means of observations using his newly developed telescope.

Traditionalists rejected heliocentrism because they were wedded to the long-established physics laid down by the 4th-century

BCE philosopher Aristotle and because various Bible references described the movements of heavenly bodies as they appeared from Earth. We still think of the Sun as 'rising' in the East and 'setting' in the West, even though we know that it is actually our planet that moves. To most of our 17th-century ancestors it was perfectly obvious that the Sun did the moving. As for Copernicus's apparent contradiction of the Bible, Galileo agreed with a prominent cardinal who observed, 'the Bible teaches us how to go to heaven, not how the heavens go'.

Most scholars  
identify Newton  
as an Antitrinitarian  
monotheist—he  
rejected the doctrine  
of the Trinity



All this would have remained within the realm of scholarly debate had not the pope come down firmly on the side of the traditionalists. He threw the weight of the Church behind the Aristotelian view. What was at stake, therefore, was not a theory of astrophysics, but the authority of the pope. For over 100 years the Catholic church had been under siege from Protestants and other heretics who challenged various aspects of belief and practice. In response, Rome became steadily more elaborate, buttressing its understanding of truth with the threat of condemnation and punishment by the Inquisition. Under these circumstances many church officials who might otherwise have been ready to give Galileo a hearing fell into line with the official Roman verdict. Some of them even refused to look through Galileo's telescope, believing that it must be some kind of magic device designed to seduce them from the truth.

Then, in 1623, Galileo had what seemed to be a stroke of luck. One of his own friends became pope as Urban VIII. He studied Galileo's arguments and instructed him to write a book describing the scholarly debate. The pope made two stipulations: Galileo was only to present heliocentrism as a possible theory. He was also to ensure that Urban's own position was clearly represented. Galileo, therefore, wrote *A Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems*. As the title suggests, the subject was presented as a discussion between a wise Copernican, 'Salviati', and a stupid, obscurantist Aristotelian, 'Simplicio'. It was through the mouth of Simplicio that the author presented Urban's arguments. The pope was furious. He summoned the old man (now in his 70s) back to Rome to face a charge of disobedience. He was found guilty, though three of his judges refused to sign the indictment. He was obliged to confess publicly that he believed

everything taught by holy church. He was sentenced to perpetual imprisonment though would likely have killed him off quickly but this was commuted to house arrest in his own home.

About the time that Galileo was clashing with ecclesiastical authority in Italy, on the other side of the Alps a conflict of altogether more terrifying and wide-ranging proportions was taking place. Between about 1626 and 1634 parts of Germany were in the grip of witch mania. Sporadic outbreaks of persecution were not uncommon in both Catholic and Protestant territories. An earlier one in Boon was describe by a contemporary in these words:

*'There must be half the city implicated for already professors, law students, pastors, canons, vicars and monks have been arrested and burned. ... The chancellor and his wife and the private secretary's wife are already executed. ... Students and boys of noble birth of nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen*



Galileo shows his telescope to the Doge Leonardo Donato



Demons dance in this genre painting by David Rijckaert the Younger

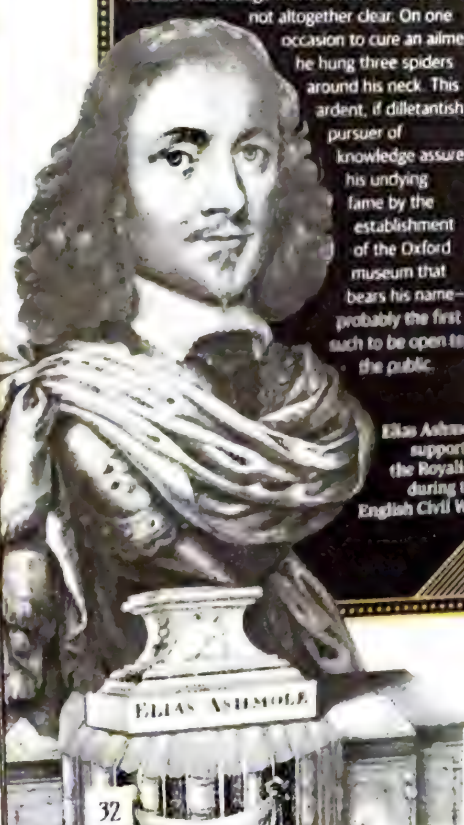


## Elias Ashmole

Elias Ashmole (1617-1692) was an example of the educated Englishman whose tastes were Catholic and who cannot, therefore, be pigeon-holed as a friend or enemy of the occult. There were many such. He went to London in 1633, became a solicitor and applied himself assiduously to building a fortune by cultivating the right people. He supported Charles I during the Civil War and joined the royal court in Oxford. There he took the opportunity to extend his education and his wide-ranging studies embraced mathematics, physics, astrology, alchemy and magic. Ashmole was a staunch Church of England man who held all nonconformists in contempt, but he became a Freemason in 1646 and he probably also flirted with Rosicrucianism. When designing his coat of arms he surmounted the shield with an image of the god Mercury supported by figures representing the twin constellation Gemini. His chosen motto, 'Ex Uno Omnia' (All comes from the One), indicated his fascination with the Hermetic tradition. Court favour and financially advantageous marriages enabled him to amass a huge collection of books, prints, coins, medals and curios that he bestowed on the University of Oxford, which, in 1669, awarded him a doctorate in Medicine. How far his own knowledge merited this accolade is not altogether clear. On one

occasion to cure an ailment he hung three spiders around his neck. This ardent, if dilettantish, pursuer of knowledge assured his undying fame by the establishment of the Oxford museum that bears his name—probably the first such to be open to the public.

Elias Ashmole supported the Royalists during the English Civil War



occasion he was caught by the king's soldiers and taken to the Tower of London. He was released after a short imprisonment.

With his collection of books, prints, coins, medals and curios, he was one of the most important collectors of the time. His collection was made up of the things people were collecting to prove to each other that they were in the possession of the best of things. There was a lot of competition in the collection of things. The collection was made up of the things people were collecting to prove to each other that they were in the possession of the best of things.

During the Civil War and the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648) Europe was a wasteland. Millions died from disease and starvation as well as military conflict. Germany lost a quarter of its population. With such manifest evil, stalking the land it is not altogether surprising that sufferers looked for

scapegoats and sought to purge these communities of them.

Folklore provided lurid descriptions of black magicians and their activities. It was widely believed that Satan summoned witches and wizards to attend 'sabbats' where blasphemous travesties of Christian worship were enacted and sacrifices were offered. Those called to such assemblies flew through the air to be present. None of this had any part in Christian doctrine but since the Bible endorsed belief in spiritual conflict between the powers of good and evil, little, if anything, was deemed so much at odds with Christianity as to challenge such notions. Among the intelligentsia opinions were divided: some men of science, such as Robert Boyle, accepted the common conception that witches existed and were in league with the devil. But there was a growing scepticism not only about the men, became accounts of occult activity, but also about the very existence of witchcraft. Samuel Harsnett (1561-1631), a cleric who eventually rose to be Archbishop of York, wrote a treatise condemning clergy who carried out exorcisms. He gave it as his opinion that people who have their brains baited and their fancies disordered with the imaginations and apprehensions of Witches, Conjurers, and Fairies, and all that Lymphatical Chimeria, find



## SCOT'S Discovery of Witchcraft

The common opinion of the Witchcraft Act of 1563, which was passed in the reign of Elizabeth I, was that it was a very bad law. It was a law that was passed in the reign of Elizabeth I, and it was a law that was passed in the reign of Elizabeth I.

Scot believed that the prosecution of those accused of witchcraft was irrational and un-Christian

Other critics, while debunking the supernatural accounts of witchcraft, were declaring that witchcraft did not actually exist.

only were they anxious to avoid being tarred as heretics, they also did not want to be as at odds with the law, for most European states had anti-witchcraft legislation in place.

Then again, the prevailing philosophical framework in which post-Renaissance debate took place made it difficult for radical thinkers to deny the possibility of magic.

Neo-Platonic metaphysics taught the interconnectedness of the physical and spiritual worlds, and sought ways of harnessing the powers latent in the cosmos. It took the best of two centuries for a rational rationale regarding this to become firmly established among the leaders of thought, and to bring all witchcraft prosecutions to an end.

Matthew Hopkins, the Witchfinder General, may have been responsible for the deaths of hundreds of women

The laying of a new philosophical ground plan was undertaken by thinkers trying to arrive at a logically acceptable concept of magic in a Europe where Catholics and Protestants were zealously slaughtering each other. As early as 1584 a down-to-earth Kentish gentleman, Reginald Scot had debunked the whole idea of malevolent magical powers on religious grounds. In his *Discoverie of Witchcraft* he argued that a





Francisco de Goya paints a witches' sabbath, attended by a he-goat

all-powerful God would not allow any human agent to exercise spiritual powers. Witches, Scot claimed, belonged to one of four categories. Some were innocent victims of malevolent neighbours. Some were self-deluded. Some were deliberate fraudsters, making money from phoney charms and potions. The rest were *genuine*—that is, they sought to inflict harm by supernatural means but any success they achieved was attributable to chance or to sinister means, such as poison or what we would now call auto-suggestion. Scot's scepticism gradually gained ground among thinking people. What is surprising, from a modern viewpoint, is that it took so long.

In the 17th century a new brand of philosophers emerged who applied their own kind of solvents to the common belief in black magic. Men like René Descartes (1596-1650), Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) and Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) were all pondering the existence and nature of God and coming to very different conclusions. The common ground they shared was a 'mechanistic' concept of the universe. However it came into being, it operated according to strict rules. Those rules were informative about the one who devised them (if, indeed, such a being existed). One by-product of this understanding of the cosmos was that it could not be changed from within—that is to say that no human being can manipulate it, perform miracles or cast effective spells. In other words, there are no such things as witches or wizards or cunning men or whatever fanciful name

"There was a growing scepticism about the very existence of witchcraft"

might be claimed by or attributed to persons thought to possess spiritual powers

Nothing better illustrates the changing mood of the times than the trial of Jane Wenham in 1712. Jane, a widow of Walken, Hertfordshire was denounced by some of her neighbours—in turn egged on by local clergy—who accused her of various malicious acts. She was tried at Hertford Assizes before Sir John Powell, who fell over backwards to steer the jury towards an acquittal. When the jury brought in a guilty verdict the judge had no alternative but to give the sentence of death by hanging. However, he immediately applied to the Crown in person for a pardon, which was immediately granted. This resulted in a frenzied pamphlet war between accusers and defenders of the clergy involved in the case. One writer who

published anonymously (probably to avoid accusations of atheism)



The Thirty Years' War saw a steep rise in accusations of witchcraft in Germany

Pope Urban VIII was a close friend of scientist Galileo Galilei



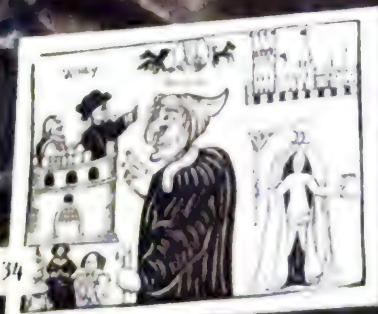
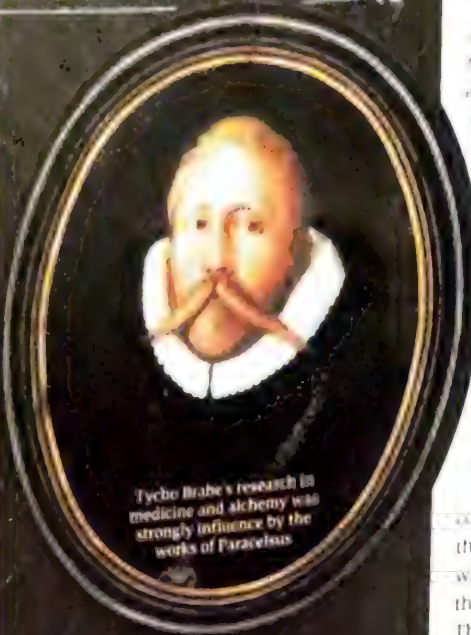


"People were ready to believe anything"

## Horoscopes

Having a horoscope prepared by an astrologer was a luxury that only the wealthy could afford – until the spread of printed periodicals. Early publishers realized that a huge market existed among people who wanted predictions about their future or advice on the most propitious time to undertake a venture. They began to produce almanacs and it is calculated that by 1650 over 400,000 of these cheap handbooks were being sold annually in England. Almanacs provided a variety of information, from important dates to medical advice, from astronomical details to predictions. They varied in quality. Some were produced by leading astronomers/astrologers, such as the Danish scholar Tycho Brahe. Others were cheap penny sensationalist offerings deliberately exploiting the gullible. It was almanacs that now made popular the predictions of ancient soothsayers. The legendary prophecies of Merlin, written in the 12th century by Geoffrey of Monmouth, were retold and made to apply to current or eminent events, as were the sayings of Mother Shipton, a 16th century Yorkshire soothsayer. The most famous seer was the French physician and astrologer Nostradamus (1503–1566), a serious scholar who, from his study of many ancient texts as well as the apocalyptic books of the Bible, made obscurely worded predictions that readers turned to eagerly to discover what fate had in store for them. In such a turbulent era people were ready to believe anything.

This statue of Mother Shipton stands in Knarborough town center



...the only way to ensure that the ...

[illegible]

That vision of a Utopian world might not  
 convinced everyone who read it but it did not  
 could abandon mas-

the point that humanity could abandon  
without abandoning God. England was one  
the first nations to put an end to witchcraft.  
Though unofficial lynchings did sometimes,  
the last legal conviction took place in 1706. It  
be another 60 years before the last European  
(Switzerland) abandoned witchcraft prosecu

The author of *A Letter from a Physician* saw the diffusion of scientific knowledge as a fundamental reason for the overcoming of superstition and the greater wellbeing of society. There was much in this assertion. One of the hidden revolutions took place in the second half of the 17th century, when education became fashionable. Between the end of the Thirty Years' War and the beginning of the Napoleonic Wars, Europe enjoyed a century and a half of relative peace. This enabled the more affluent members of society to concentrate on acquiring the arts of civilized living. This was the age of the Grand Tour. The scions of wealthy English families were despatched to the Continent for three years or so to learn foreign languages, to discover foreign cultures and study with some of the leading intellectuals of the age. The more acquisitive and acquisitive travellers returned with cartloads (sometimes shiploads) of souvenirs: paintings, sculptures, books, various scientific specimens—with which to adorn their mansions and impress their friends.

A parallel development was the foundation of academies where gentlemen of leisure met to discuss all aspects of science and the arts. In 1636 the Parisian Academy was established and, in 1662, this developed into the French Académie des Sciences. In 1662 the Royal Society of London for Improving Natural Knowledge came into being.



and as the name indicates, it enjoyed active royal patronage from the new king, Charles II. Similar learned bodies were set up in Berlin and other European centers. Here members delivered lectures, debated and performed experiments. They wrote reports of their proceedings, which were circulated to other members of this intellectual elite throughout Europe.

But such societies did not only exist in major cities. Leaders of rural societies who liked to think of themselves as cultured set up regional debating societies. For example, in 1710 certain Lincolnshire gentlemen and clergy established The Society of Gentlemen for the Supporting of Mutual Benevolence and Their Improvement in the Liberal Sciences and in Polite Learning. Among those invited to address its meetings were Sir Isaac Newton, Sir Hans Sloane (the president of the Royal Society, whose collection later formed the nucleus of the British Museum), the Rev William Stukeley (an antiquarian and celebrated archaeological pioneer of both the Stonehenge and Avebury excavations), and the poets Alexander Pope and John Gay. Also significant is the fact that among the Spalding Society's founder members was the Rector of Epworth, one Samuel Wesley, father of John and Charles Wesley, the founders of the Methodist movement.

We now associate the Wesley brothers with the religious revival of the mid-18th century together with its sister movement, the Great Awakening,

led by George Whitefield in North America.

But this does not mean that they were uninterested in anti-patheistic thought, more in science. On the contrary, John Wesley widely read the writings of Robert Boyle, John Locke and Sir Isaac Newton. Of Newton he wrote that he 'turned the lamp of knowledge into paths that had been unexplored before'. Just as for Wesley there was no

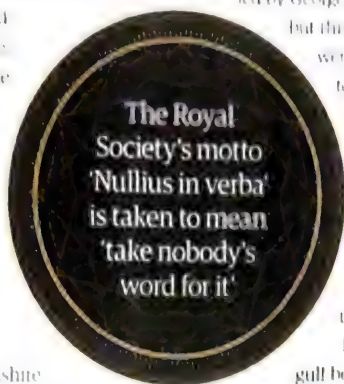
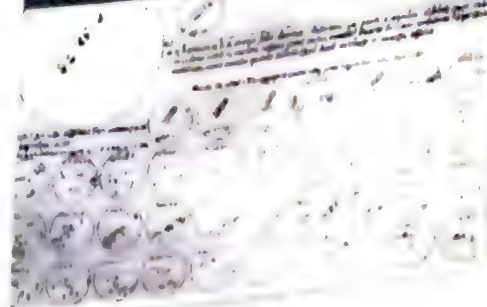
gulf between religion and science, so for Newton, who was President of

the Royal Society from 1703 to 1727, there was no divide between science, religion and occultism. For this polymath all aspects of the unknown were ripe for investigation. He devoted years to the study of alchemy. Among his voluminous unpublished papers there appear more than 50,000 words on the manufacture of the philosopher's stone, supposedly able to turn base metals into gold. But his investigations went beyond the study of transmutation. He was concerned to know how chemical substances were formed and what they were made of (what we would now call their molecular structure). In pursuit of such knowledge he did not hesitate to communicate with clandestine, pseudo-magical communities frowned upon by the rest of the scientific

fraternity. Newton's knowledge of the Bible was prodigious and his approach to theology was just as individualistic as his reflections on pure science. For instance, he abandoned an early resolve to seek ordination because he discovered that he could no longer believe in the Trinity. Social and political developments in the 18th century were fundamental to changes of attitude regarding the occult. The widening educational gap between upper and lower classes meant that working people in rural communities tended to cling longer to traditional beliefs. This explains, for

example, why learned judges and doctors found themselves at odds with the stubborn, witch-beliefs of simple villagers. But the beginnings of industrialisation changed the demographic of many areas. People were drawn to the cities in search of work, leaving behind their rural

This illustration by Galileo shows the movement of sunspots across the Sun.



Galileo's telescope c.1610

communities and the folklore that lurked therein. This is an underlying reason for the gradual fading of occult beliefs among the lower orders of society.

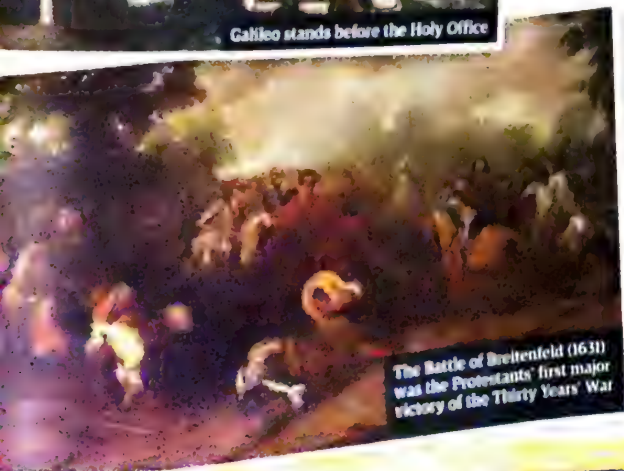
At the same time, philosophers and their wealthy patrons were directing their thinking away from speculation about the supernatural and towards the solving of political problems. King Louis XV of France (1710-1774) is credited with the prophetic utterance 'Après moi le déluge'. The old order, headed by absolute monarchs like himself, was under threat from revolutionary forces – and from philosophers who challenged the political principles upon which the concept of a semi-divine hereditary monarchy rested.

Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), John Locke (1632-1704) and Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) were among the leading thinkers who explored the concept of the 'social contract' and the issue of political power. Was it top-down, invested by God in chosen leaders – monarchs and aristocrats – or bottom-up, residing in the people, who had the right to choose their own governors? Radical thinking gave some sort of rationale to revolutionary activists.

In 1776 American colonists severed ties with Britain. In 1789 the French Revolution broke out. King Louis XVI was executed, France became a republic and found itself at war with the other major European powers. The decades of comparative peace were over. The Continent – and, indeed, the world – was entering an entirely new era of warfare. There would be new battles to be fought on the ground and new arguments to be aired in the sanctuaries of the philosophers.



Galileo stands before the Holy Office



The Battle of Breitenfeld (1631) was the Protestants' first major victory of the Thirty Years' War



# Palmistry

You can tell a lot from a person's face, and even more from their hands if you just so happen to be a skilled chirologist...

Written by Poppy-Jay Palmer

**A**lso known as chiromancy, palmistry is the ancient palm-reading divination practice that is still being used today. Those who practice palmistry are usually called palmists, hand readers, hand analysts or chirologists. Unlike other divinary arts, interpretations of the palm tend to differ across different schools of palmistry. Add that to the fact that there has always been a big lack of evidence as to whether palmistry predictions are

accurate, and you can see why this led to the art being viewed as a pseudoscience by academics.

Through examining palms, chirologists are supposedly able to evaluate a person's character or future life. They look at the lines on the palm and determine what they mean based on their size, quality, and what their intersections look like. Sometimes the divination extends to looking at fingers, hand flexibility, skin patterns, also known as dermatoglyphics, and more. Even a person's hand shape can determine their future, and these

are classified by one of four groups: earth (square, broad, with coarse skin), air (square with long fingers), water (long, oval-shaped palm with long fingers), and fire (square, with flushed skin and short fingers).

The main section of a reading, however, is based around the lines found on almost all hands: the heart line, found towards the top of the palm and linked to love and attraction; the head line, starting at the edge of the palm under the index finger and flowing to the other edge, linked to intellectualism, learning and communication style and knowledge; and the life line, which starts at the end of the palm above the thumb and flows to just above the wrist, and is linked to vitality, physical health and wellbeing and, in ancient times, a person's lifespan.

Though palmistry is practiced all over the world, it has always been most commonly used on the Eurasian landmass, particularly in India, Nepal, Tibet, Persia, China, Sumer, Babylon, Mesopotamia and historic Palestine. Many people believe palmistry began in ancient India and spread from there, but the exact origins of the art are now unknown. However, through moving across countries and cultures, it also developed a lot, especially in ancient Greece.

By medieval times, palmistry was practiced by witch-hunters, who saw uneven pigmentation and black spots on the palm as a sign of making a deal with the Devil. It began to be suppressed by the Catholic Church, which saw it as a pagan superstition. By the Renaissance, it made a comeback in the magical world, but was still classified as a 'forbidden art'.

The other 'forbidden arts' were necromancy, geomancy, aeromancy, pyromancy, hydromancy and scapulimancy

A chirologist looks for omens of the future in artist Jean Béraud's 1899 piece 'La Divination de la main aventure'





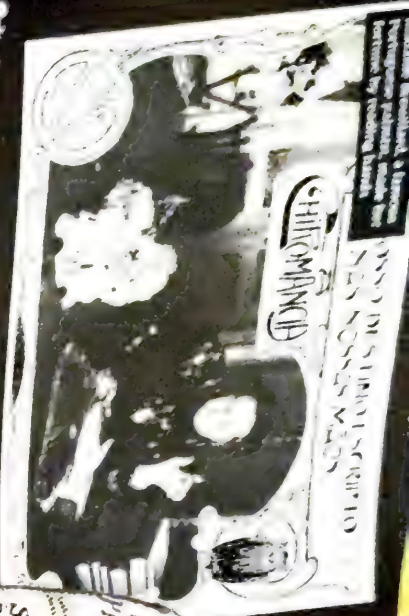
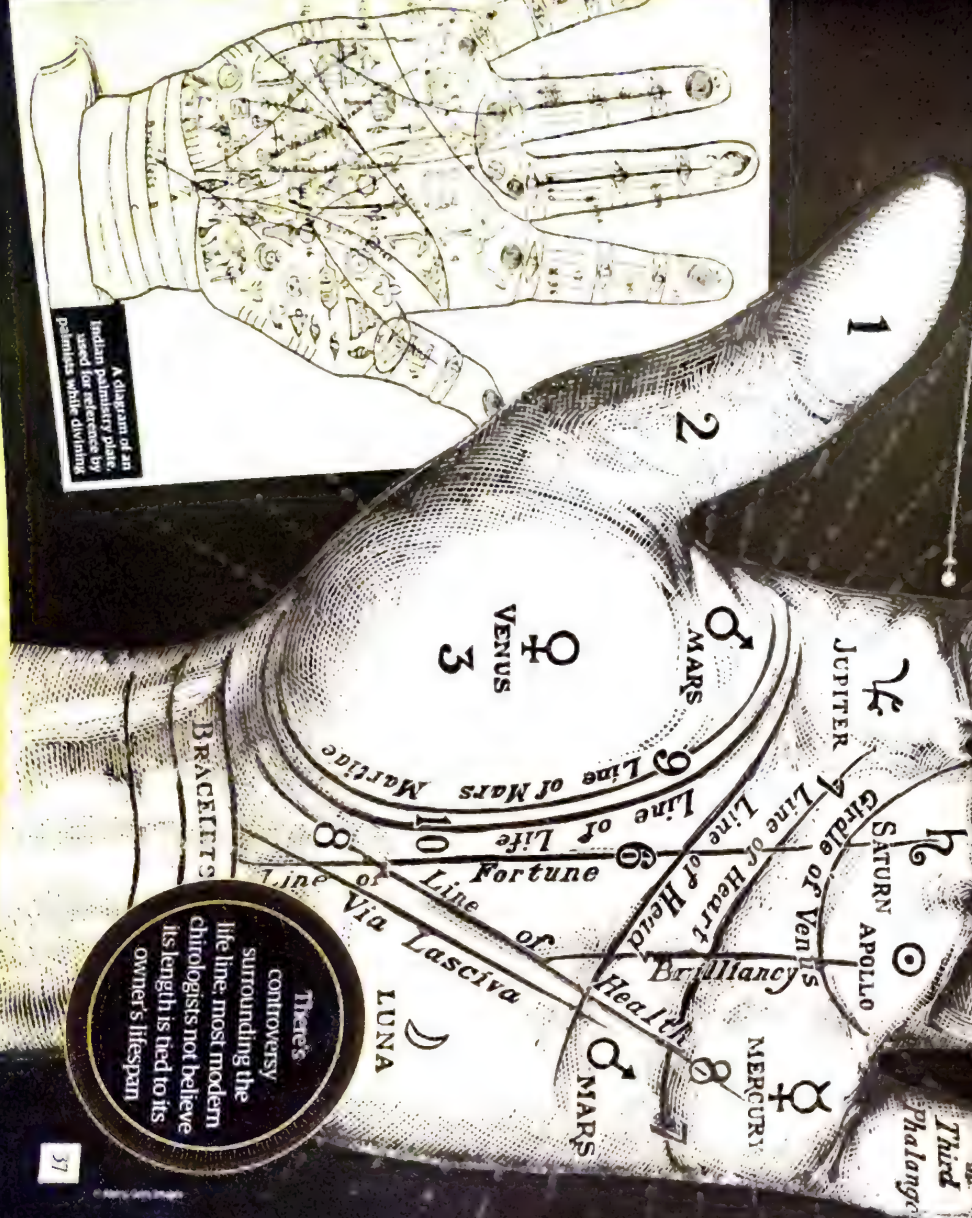


Illustration of a palmistry session, showing the palmist's hands, and the client's hand, as described by Robert B. Heine.

★ Palmists determine what the lines mean based on their size, quality, and what their intersections look like.



There's controversy surrounding the life line; most modern chirologists not believe its length is tied to its owner's lifespan

A palmistry diagram of the hand, showing the lines and symbols, as described by Robert B. Heine.

A diagram of an Indian palmistry plate, used for reference by palmists while divining



# The ghoul next door

Revered and feared in villages across Europe, cunning folk and their magic were part of everyday life until a new move against witches led many to their deaths

— — — — — Written by June Woolerton — — — — —

When Issobell Sinclair admitted she had talked to fairies as she tried to protect cattle from harm on Halloween with a sheet

and some hair, she sealed her fate. The Scottish woman was hanged as a witch soon after her trial in 1633. But just a century earlier she might have gone unharmed, even unnoticed. For Issobell was following a path that thousands of men and women had taken, for centuries. While witches, also called cunning or wise folk, had been an integral part of many God-fearing communities since Roman times. They made cures, gave advice and offered protection to people and their livelihoods. But as organized religion changed and fear of witchcraft spread in the 16th and 17th centuries, the thin line between their practices and the darker arts of magic, witchcraft blurred, and soon the places they had once called home were no place for the ghoul next door.

Magic was so widely practiced in Tudor England that leading cleric, Bishop Hugh Latimer, warned secretly in 1552 that: 'a great many of us when we have trouble or sickness or lose anything, we run to some old woman to get some of her cunning, where we had work done.' But what if the cunning folk

where to find a witch or cunning person to help them with their problems. It was no different across Europe. The wise folk were a fixture in their communities, inspiring both respect and fear. And in an age when science could offer little explanation for anything, their wisdom held power.

The position was open to anyone, although some people were believed to be born with special powers. Seventh sons of seventh sons were said to be able to cure gout and scrofula. There was

also a belief that special powers could be inherited or passed on from one cunning person to their chosen successor. But anyone who wanted to learn magic and was willing to try it could acquire a reputation as one of the cunning folk. The range of people practising magic can be seen in the conviction secured in Rouen in France in 1605 when shepherds,

apothecaries and labourers were all found guilty of being witches. The

cunning folk came from all walks of life and often lived in the very heart of their communities.

Whether their spells worked wasn't really the issue. Once someone was known as a wise man or woman, they would find themselves consulted on a regular basis. Often they did it for prestige rather than to get rich. Many cunning folk earned very little from their magic, and many kept prices low

**Potions made of urine and hair were made for protection against witches, who would suffer pain if the bottle was buried or burned**









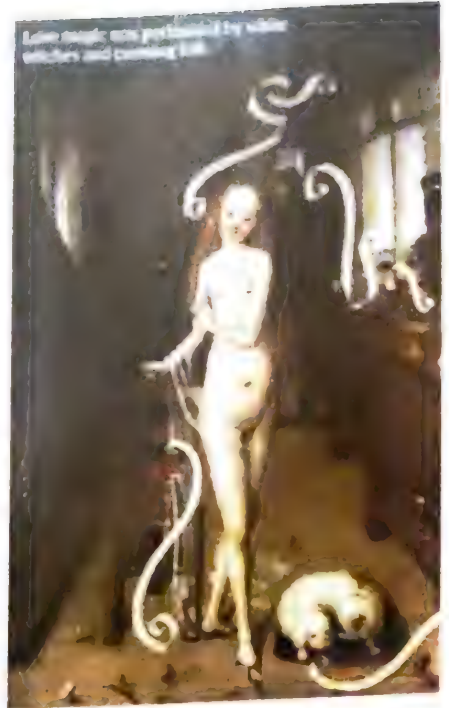


## Why witches were usually women

Usually old, sometimes ugly, and female. The witch of medieval fairytales still lingers in a stereotype today. Court records show that across Europe the majority of those tried as witches were women even though white witches and cunning folk were just as likely to be men. However, as the Church became more intent on stamping out all forms of heresy, women became the main focus of witch hunts.

From the 15th century onwards women were seen as being more susceptible to the influence of magic. They were viewed as just men and women, shaped by many wild forces, rising on demonology described how fitted women who were reduced into evil by the Devil and took part in satanic orgies. Later reformers took an equally dim view. For Martin Luther, women were so weak that they were easily

won over by the promises of magic. In the 16th and 17th centuries, witches were nearly always women and any men caught in the act were usually seen to have been tempted over to darkness by a wicked woman. But when the wave of persecutions ended and witchcraft was no longer pursued through the courts, the wise folk recorded in local communities once more featured men as well as women.



Lower image: witch persecuted by white witches and cunning folk.

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The witch hunts across Europe in the 15th and 17th century are believed to have led to at least 40,000 documented executions. Many more are thought to have died while in prison, awaiting trial, or to have taken their own lives through fear. By the 18th century, witchcraft began to fade from criminal records, but the Enlightenment also meant that many of the old practices that had put white witches into so much trouble had just then been shared with people. Old wives' tales and folklore still exist but they are just echoes of a time when they had real power to the ghoul next door.

magical powers. But in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, it was the white witch who was increasingly at risk of capture.

Attitudes to all forms of magic had been changing rapidly since the 1400s. The only Christian law that ruled both magic and wizardry had been abolished. But during the Middle Ages, when the Church's attention was on the witch, he was caught again. The German churchman Heinrich Kramer saw witches as a real threat to society and to the church. He wrote the *Malleus magicorum* (The Hammer of Witches) in 1487.

He wrote that witchcraft was real and a heresy. It would influence attitudes for three hundred years. Kramer wanted witches hunted down, tortured if need be to extract confessions and put to death. Black witches, who used magic to harm others, were liable to arrest already. But now

the white witch was seen as a threat to society. They were seen as being more susceptible to the influence of magic. They were viewed as just men and women, shaped by many wild forces, rising on demonology described how fitted women who were reduced into evil by the Devil and took part in satanic orgies. Later reformers took an equally dim view. For Martin Luther, women were so weak that they were easily won over by the promises of magic. In the 16th and 17th centuries, witches were nearly always women and any men caught in the act were usually seen to have been tempted over to darkness by a wicked woman. But when the wave of persecutions ended and witchcraft was no longer pursued through the courts, the wise folk recorded in local communities once more featured men as well as women.

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# Home of a cunning woman

## The tools of the trade for a folk healer England, 17th century

Cunning-folk were in existence from at least the 14th century, but by the 17th century they were a staple part of English life. Considered a blessing by those who used their services and a plague by social commentators of the day, it was estimated that one could not go more than ten miles without coming across a practicing cunning-man or woman in some parts of England, meaning most would have met one at some point.

Well known for their healing skills, they were often called on during times of sickness. Love magic was also particularly popular, with curious young women wanting help conceiving or to know the identity of a future husband. Others came wanting help identifying a thief and recovering stolen property, and even, in some cases, locating hidden treasures. Although often lumped together with witches, cunning-folk were actually the anti-witch, and one of their most called upon skills was that of diagnosing bewitchment and un-witching the victims.

Unlike witches, cunning-folk were never pursued with any great enthusiasm by authorities, and although some of their practices, such as the location of treasure, were punishable under witchcraft legislation, they were never prosecuted in great numbers. The line between cunning-woman and witch was sometimes thin, however, and there was little help for those against who popular opinion turned.

### How do we know this?

Sources for the work and activities of cunning-folk from the 16th century onwards are varied and sometimes conflicting. Commentators of the day such as Reginald Scot, John Melton and Thomas Cooper among others gave their personal experience and opinions on the cunning-folk operating in their areas, and while these can be contradictory and colored by personal opinion, there is also evidence from court records, newspapers and compiler accounts that provide a wealth of information on these characters.

### Important texts

The majority of cunning-folk were literate to some degree and clients would expect them to have a variety of books or grimoires ready to be consulted. In reality, it was not guaranteed that the cunning-folk would understand more than a fraction of what they contained. These texts, often in Latin and containing various symbols and diagrams, ranged from the mathematical to religious books such as the Bible.

### Mirror or glass

A successful cunning woman knew how to get her clients to do the work for them: to identify a thief or person who had bewitched them, the cunning person would ask the afflicted to look into a reflective surface and say what or who they saw there. This was particularly successful if the client already had a preconceived idea of who might want to cause them harm.

### Witch bottle

Considered safer than confronting a suspected witch, this was a service that a cunning woman could provide after diagnosing bewitchment. The bottle, often made from stoneware, would be filled with urine, hair and nail clippings from the victim, along with pins, thorns or iron nails. It was sealed then buried or heated, the aim to cause pain to the witch, forcing them to break their hold on the victim.

### Written charms

Cunning-women were often called upon to provide charms to protect and ward off trouble, frequently provided in a written form. Ranging in complexity from a short popular section of one of the gospels to more elaborate pleas for protection, these were worn on the person or concealed about the home, person was guilty, thereby identifying the culprit.

### Bible and key

A popular method used by a cunning-woman to identify a thief or wrong-doer for a client: the names of several suspects were written on paper and put in turn into the end of a key. The key was then placed on an open page of the Bible (often the first psalm) and the verse read out loud. The book and key would turn if the named person was guilty, thereby identifying the culprit.



## Herbs and plants

A cunning woman's herbs and plants were used to cure ailments and were kept in a special box or bag. Some were used to cure the sick, while others were used to cure the dead. The cunning woman's herbs and plants were used to cure the sick and the dead.

## Robbery

The cunning woman's work was often used to help the poor and the sick. She would use her herbs and plants to cure the sick and the dead. She would also use her work to help the poor and the sick.

## Payment

Unlike standard characters, the cunning woman was running a business, receiving payment in either money or kind for their services. Fortune telling brought in a few pence a time, whereas theft detection could be charged at several shillings, depending on what was being located.

## Sign of other occupation

Most cunning folk had a mundane occupation alongside their magical work. Far from being the case that she could not support herself through this, the cunning woman's work could be more lucrative than their traditional employment, which was often kept up to maintain respectability.

## How do we know this?

Historians have used a variety of cunning folk from the 16th century onwards, and sometimes conflicting. Some of the best sources are Reginald Scot, John Melton and Thomas Sturges, who gave their personal experience and opinions on the cunning folk operating in their areas, and while these are not necessarily as detailed as the personal papers, there are a number of other sources, such as newspaper and pamphlet accounts that provide a wealth of information on these characters.

## Sieve and shears

One popular request of the local cunning woman was for help to locate either lost or stolen property or, more ambitiously, the location of hidden treasure. The sieve and shears was a common method used for these tasks. The sieve was balanced atop the point of the shears, and the question of the guilt or otherwise of several people asked in turn. At the name of the thief, the sieve would spin and identify the culprit.



# The Witch's spellbook

Witches have recorded their spells and incantations and referred to them throughout history as ancient texts survive to influence modern practices

Written by Mike Flaskew

Since the concepts and practice of witchcraft date to classical antiquity, it follows reasonably that those who have concocted potions, charmed incantations, and cast spells throughout history should record their methods and workings for themselves and future generations.

While accused witches of the Middle Ages and early modern period were convenient scapegoats, targets for hunters who used them to explain the origins of famine, pestilence, disease, and other misfortune, they evidently were literate, capable of both reading and writing or availing themselves of scribes or associates who performed these services. It is estimated that roughly 80 percent of accused witches in 16th-18th century Europe were women, often old, poor and sometimes unattractive in appearance. Remarkably, so-called witches were also pioneers in medicine, chemistry, and other disciplines who managed to preserve their knowledge, their witchcraft, in writing.

Ancient Egyptians and Greeks laid down liturgy and spells on papyrus, referencing spells that required "an offering of frankincense" or the placing of an "interrupted and pure" child in a trance

before a glowing fire. Dating to the 11th century, the *Picatrix* was originally written in Arabic, confirming the precept that witchcraft transcends cultural boundaries, and its more than 400 pages include some concoctions with disgusting ingredients along with spells, focusing on astrological energy in the pursuit of knowledge and power. Similarly, the *Galdraþók* originated in Iceland in the 16th century and contains contributions from numerous witches. Its 47 spells include runes purported to harbour supernatural attributes, and much of its content relates to physical healing for such conditions as fatigue, headaches, sleeplessness, as well as childbirth pain.

Although its exact date of origin is unknown, *The Sworn Book of Honorius* is verified to have existed during the 14th century. Its oldest preserved

manuscript dates to 1347. The work opens with a stinging rebuke of the Roman Catholic church and its text that supposedly assists in the practice of necromancy, or communication with the dead. Witchcraft lore explicitly specifies that only three copies of *The Sworn Book of Honorius* can be produced, that anyone who possesses one of these and is unable to find a suitable heir must take the text to their grave, and that those who ascribe to its teachings are required to refrain from keeping company with women.

Tangible evidence points to a substantial body of written witchcraft teachings that span the period from ancient times through the early modern period. Many of these have been exhaustively studied both for their genuine original purpose and their historical significance.

"Witches were pioneers in medicine, chemistry, and other disciplines who managed to preserve their knowledge in writing"



# Visions and mysterious volumes

Spellbooks come in all shapes and sizes, from leechbooks dealing with common maladies, to grimoires instructing how to summon demons

There are many different types of spellbooks, from leechbooks dealing with common maladies, to grimoires instructing how to summon demons. The word 'grimoire' comes from a French figure of speech meaning 'hard to understand'.

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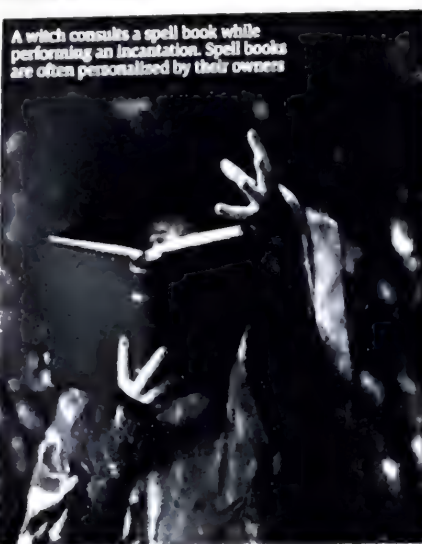
A book of shadows contains spells, incantations, sigils, and other information vital to practitioners of witchcraft

The word 'grimoire' comes from a French figure of speech meaning 'hard to understand'. The word 'grimoire' comes from a French figure of speech meaning 'hard to understand'.

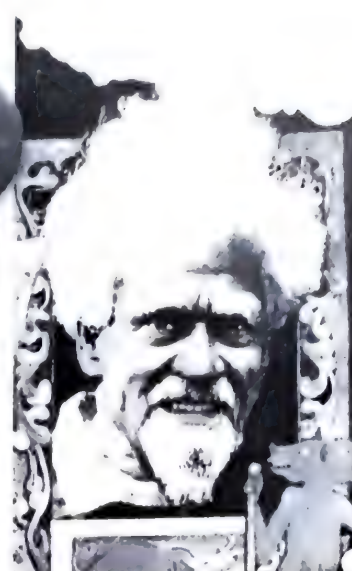


The best-known book of its type, *Bald's Leechbook* dates to the 10th century, and a single manuscript housed in the British Library in London survives. Divided into two sections, the first dealing with external maladies, and the second with internal conditions, the leechbook offers practical cures for headaches, shingles and aching feet.

Medieval witches used sigils as representations of angels and demons that they might call upon, and the grimoire *The Lesser Key of Solomon* lists 28 demons representing the hierarchy of hell and their corresponding sigils. Presenting a demon's sigil was thought to provide the witch with some degree of control over it.



A witch consults a spell book while performing an incantation. Spell books are often personalized by their owners



## A modern grimoire

Sometime during the late 1940s, Gerald Gardner, the acknowledged father of Wicca, wrote his *Book of Shadows*, subsequently introducing it to the members of his Bricket Wood coven. While *Book of Shadows* is a term generally used to describe a witch's personal volume containing their own incantations and rituals, Gardner contended that his book included information he had been given as a member of the New Forest coven decades earlier, along with his own contributions.

Although he asserted that sections of the book had their origins in early witchcraft historiography, sections were actually attributable to other books as well, such as the *Key of Solomon*, a text probably from the Renaissance, the *Gospel of the Witches* written by Charles Godfrey Leland and purported to be the religious book of an Italian coven, and from the writings of poet Rudyard Kipling and occult practitioner and magician Aleister Crowley. Doreen Valiente, high priestess of the Bricket Wood coven, made significant alterations to Gardner's book after questioning its authorship.

Gardner stated that witches had been prohibited from putting their rituals and incantations in writing in earlier times due to fear of persecution, but they later began doing so. The publication of Gardner's *Book of Shadows* spurred greater interest in Wicca, and the notion of such books has become a staple of popular culture.



# Practising the witch's art

The witch persona revolves around a relationship with the devil and the ability to cast spells, predict the future, heal the sick, and place curses. After their arrest, accused witches were subjected to harsh interrogation and torture. Confessions were extracted under duress, and they were often based strongly on suggestion, ranging from flying on brooms, poles or animals to meetings with the devil involving seduction, debauched ritual sex, and selling of souls in exchange for dark powers. Accused witches were stripped and searched for marks on their bodies, signs the individual was the devil's own.

Witches would cast spells for many purposes, from finding love to improving financial or social position, punishing enemies, and removing warts. Those willing to pay might purchase a spell for a good harvest. Conversely, witches were also accused of murders, including the deaths of children.

During the Middle Ages, a significant climatic cooling period occurred—witches were blamed for crop failures, pandemic disease, and any increases in criminal activity that followed. After the Black Death swept through Europe in the 14th century and decimated villages, the attitude toward witches shifted from curiosity and tolerance to fear and persecution.

Curing any ailments from cancer to halitosis and poison ivy were other common practices undertaken by witches. Simmering the fresh root of a dogtooth violet or the tongue of an

adder in milk and then drinking the concoction supposedly cured stomach ulcers, while an ounce of trailing arbutus leaves in boiling water, taken several times a day, cured kidney stones.

Perhaps the most infamous of England's witch trials was that of the Pendle Witches in Lancashire in the summer of 1612. Nine women and two men were hanged, and the entire affair began with a curse. A young woman either begged or asked to purchase pins from a local peddler. After she was refused, the peddler suffered a

stroke. The woman confessed that she had sold her soul to Satan and asked the Devil to cripple the peddler. Curses ranged from simple to complex, involving just a spit of saliva, a written note later burned, clay figures or dolls, or a lengthy ritual spanning several days.

Despite this, witches were consulted for their clairvoyance or precognition. One English witch, Mother Shipton of Knaresborough, Yorkshire, is believed to have predicted the invention of trains, planes, automobiles, and the telegraph centuries before they appeared. Amulets and charms were also believed to be effective protection. Carried or hung in windows, these consisted of bags of herbs, sigils, or miniature everyday items such as nails or horseshoes.

Witches were blamed for anything from crop failures to the sudden death of children

## Spells in a witch's arsenal

- ⚡ Afflicted neighbour's children with strange symptoms and behavior
- ⚡ Conjured the spirit of a dead man
- ⚡ Manipulated the weather to produce rain or snow
- ⚡ Caused an individual to suffer nightmares
- ⚡ Cast a love spell to win the heart of a man
- ⚡ Cursed enemies with continuing bad luck
- ⚡ Provided protection from diseases
- ⚡ Rid neighbour of an unwanted husband
- ⚡ Recovered a lost object
- ⚡ Silenced a gossip



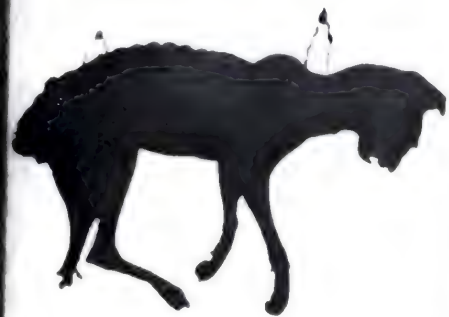
Witches are blamed for the burning down of a house



# Protection from maleficium

## Dead Cat

In Europe the custom of placing a dead cat within the walls of a house persists to this day. While serving as a good luck charm, the cat's remains are also believed by some to repel or lure a witch away from the premises. Although some have asserted that cats were once walled in alive, forensic evidence of dried carcasses suggest that the placement occurred after the animal had died. Dead rodents or birds have been discovered along with the cats as well.



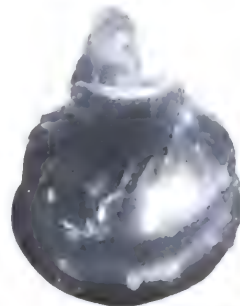
## Elf Arrow

The ancient elf arrow, actually an arrowhead made by Neolithic peoples, was believed to have been used by elves to hunt cattle and inflict pains, called elfshot, on humans. However, when recovered they could be used as charms or amulets, often worn around the neck and adorned with silver, to ward off witches. Elf arrows were never to be sought, but were found in unusual places. They were to be protected from sunlight to prevent their falling into the hands of witches and used for evil purposes.



## Witch Bottle

The witch bottle dates to the 16th century and provided a means of revenge, a spell on an adversarial witch. Sometimes prepared by another witch or folk healer, the witch bottle contained the victim's hair, nail, blood, urine, and possibly rosemary, bent grass, pins, and red wine. Buried at the farthest corner of the victim's property, beneath the hearth or some other nondescript location, the witch bottle supposedly irritated the offending witch to the point that they would remove the spell.



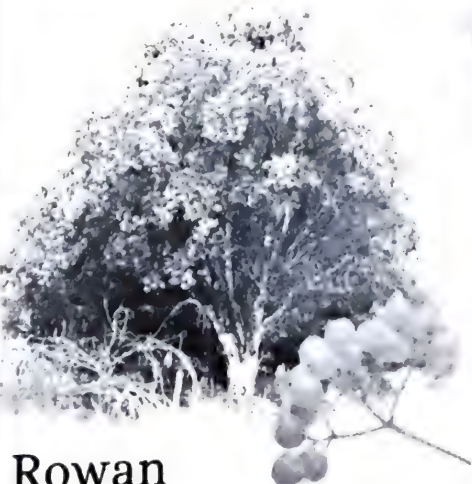
## Witch's Seat

Also known as a witch's stone, these were stones that protruded from the chimneys of homes. Their original purpose was probably to prevent water from running into the house between the thatched roof and stone chimney, however, through the years the stones became associated with witches flying about during their returns from meetings with the Devil. They supposedly rested on the seats. In the absence of the stones, the witches might descend the chimney and cause turmoil in the home.



## Witch Ball

Typically made of brightly coloured glass, these spherical objects were popularised during the Middle Ages. Early examples were crudely made, but by the 19th century their production was improved with higher-quality glass. Sometimes hung in an eastern window or suspended by a thread, they warded off witches or trapped them inside the orbs. Folk tales suggest that witch balls also protected the dwelling from the curse of the evil eye. The balls were sometimes filled with holy water or salt to increase effectiveness.



## Rowan

In Britain the rowan tree was said to be the tree from which the Devil hanged his mother. Planted near the front door of a home or elsewhere on the property, it was considered a powerful deterrent against witches. The physical appearance of the rowan, a five-pointed star or pentagram on each berry and a vivid red colour, was believed the source of its strength. Crosses were sometimes made of rowan wood and worn for personal protection. Pieces of rowan were also attached to cattle.



Many believe djinn are in the world, even today. In the Middle East, they are known as *Jinn* or *Jinn*. They are said to be powerful and can bring bad luck or good fortune. It is an interesting story about the world and the power of the unseen.

Witchcraft is often linked to the djinn in the Middle East, with many believing sorcerers can summon djinn to do their bidding



# Djinn

Djinn are so much more than wish-granting, lamp-inhabiting genies, especially as far as Arabian and Islamic mythology is concerned

Written by Poppy-Jag Palmer

**W**hen translated into English, djinn means 'hidden from sight' or 'the hidden ones', so naturally there's still a lot of mystery surrounding them.

Anglicized as 'genies' and Romanized as 'djinn', djinn are supernatural creatures (categorized as spirits and demons) that played a large part in Arabian and later Islamic mythology.

A lot of Arabian people worshipped djinn like gods during the Pre-Islamic period, but unlike gods djinn were not regarded as being immortal. Though the exact origin of djinn remains unclear, a number of scholars believe that they began as malevolent spirits of deserts and unclean places who could take animal form. Others think they were originally pagan deities that fell from grace as other deities became more important. Djinn may have been worshipped but they were also feared and thought to be the cause of a variety of diseases and mental illnesses, with the mentally ill being described as 'majnun', Arabic for 'djinn-possessed'.

As far as Islamic theology is concerned, djinn has two definitions, the first being an object that human sensory organs cannot detect, including angels, demons and the

interior of human beings, and the second being an invisible entity created from smokeless fire by God, who roamed the earth before Adam.

It is believed by Muslims that Muhammad was sent as a prophet to both human and djinn communities. Likewise, ancient Israeli king Solomon was gifted by God to be able to talk to djinn and animals. The story goes that the djinn were originally sent to live in harmony with

humans, but a certain amount of injustice and corruption led to God sending angels to battle the djinn. With the revelation of Islam they were given another chance at salvation.

Even in modern times, many Egyptians believe sleep paralysis is caused by djinn attacks

As the Islamic religion developed, the djinn were downgraded from deities to regular spirits. They were placed on the same level as humans and were subject to God's judgement, and able to attain futures in Paradise or Hell. When Islam began to spread outside of Arabia into Africa, Turkey, Iran

and India, beliefs about the djinn also began to develop as they reached different communities. Persians likened djinn to the Daeva from Zoroastrian lore and believed they could possess humans. Moroccans believed this too and devised rituals to exorcize them. But all depictions of djinn shared certain similarities: they lived in human-like societies, where they ate and drank, practiced religion, had families and experienced emotions.

"Djinn may have been worshipped, but they were also feared"

Djinn and other unusual creatures dance in this ancient Middle Eastern script. The copyist and artist are unknown

An illustration by Edmund Dulac of the djinn from 'Aladdin's Wonderful Lamp', published in 1938



Rosicrucianism declined in popularity during the 17th century due to the European intellectual movement, the Enlightenment



This emblematic image of the Invisible College of the Rosy Cross emerged in 1618





# Rosicrucianism

When ancient manifestos telling of a secret brotherhood emerged after being 'hidden' for decades, a new spiritual movement began

— — — — — Written by David Crookes — — — — —

Europe in the early 17th century was not a happy place. It was a continent marked by religious divisions and political strife which would escalate into the bloody Thirty Years War that led to eight million lives being lost.

At the same time, it was a period of great change. During the century, modern philosophy and science emerged thanks to impressive thinkers such as Newton and Descartes. But were these men also members of the spiritual movement Rosicrucianism? Some have said so but, alas, we may never know.

There are a great many stories and myths about Rosicrucianism, not least those which surround its origins. What we know to be true, however, is that in 1614 in the Holy Roman Empire state of Hesse-Kassel, located in present-day Germany, the first of two anonymously published manifestos was published that would cause a huge stir, not least because they apparently shed light on a supposed secret brotherhood that no one had heard of before.

From that point on, you can take much of the origin story with a pinch of salt. For while the first of these manifestos, the *Fama Fraternitatis of the Meritorious Order of the Rosy Cross*, was a revelation to all who read or learned about it, it was heralded as a hoax, a joke or mere allegory, depending on the interpretation, almost from the start. But that's not to say it didn't have many followers or believers, or that it wasn't even legitimate. Quite the opposite.

It was viewed as another path to enlightenment and many saw it as a way forward for intellectual, social, religious and political reform.

The *Fama Fraternitatis* told of a poor German doctor and mystic philosopher called Christian Rosenkreuz, who, it was claimed, had travelled across Damascus, Egypt and Morocco towards Jerusalem at the turn of the 15th century in a bid to learn the occult secrets of the universe, obtain true wisdom and discover the elixir of life.

Over the course of his journey, Rosenkreuz (or Father Brother C.R.C. as he was referred

to in the text), was said to have studied under secret Arabian masters of the occult arts, and he is understood to have built up an enviable knowledge of physics, mathematics, magic and Kabbalah.

English philosopher, scientist, statesman and author Francis Bacon is alleged to have had connections with Rosicrucianism.





## The symbol of the Rose Cross

The Rose Cross, otherwise known as the Rosy Cross, was said to have been created by Christian Rosenkreuz, the founder of Rosicrucianism. But since we know Rosenkreuz to be fictional, we can suppose it was actually the work of whoever produced the manifestos that underpinned the movement.

It takes the Christian symbol of the cross and embeds it with a rose at its center, and it clearly marries well with Christian Rosenkreuz's name. What it actually symbolizes is open to debate, although some posit that the cross represents the human body and the rose the unfolding consciousness of individuals.

The Rose Cross has also come to represent silence and salvation for some, while others see it as symbol of human reproduction being elevated to the spiritual, with the rose being female and the cross male.

Such is its power and attractiveness, it came to be used by more modern groups such as the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, an organisation which was devoted to the study and practice of the occult from 1887 to 1903. It still forms part of the emblems of the Rosicrucian Fellowship and the Ancient Mystical Order Rosae Crucis, or AMORC.



When the manifestos were first published, they were well-received and inspired many to join the movement. The first manifesto, the *Fama Fraternitatis*, was published in 1614 and the second, the *Confessio Fraternitatis*, in 1615. Both were written in a style that was both poetic and philosophical, and they were both attributed to Christian Rosenkreuz. The *Fama Fraternitatis* was a short, 11-page document, while the *Confessio Fraternitatis* was a longer, 100-page document. Both were written in Latin, and they were both written in a style that was both poetic and philosophical.

The first of these men were understood to be good doctors determined to heal the sick for free. They agreed to wear only the dress of the country they were in to continue the order by finding someone worthy to succeed themselves after death and to ensure that the Fraternity would remain secret for 100 years.

But while it was suggested that Rosenkreuz himself had scribed the words, squirrelling the resulting manuscript away only for it to be discovered later, only fundamentalists really took it literally or believed the man actually existed. The rest saw *Fama Fraternitatis* as an allegorical manuscript, although some have also come to believe that the Order of the Rose Cross may have been a disguise for another secret movement.

In any case, the point of Rosicrucianism was that it shed light on an ancient world order blending science, alchemy, arts and mysticism with an emphasis on acquired knowledge as a way for mankind to move forward. Like Kabbalah it pointed to one truth, told via the use of various symbols, parables and metaphors.

*Fama Fraternitatis* explored philosophy, religion and ethics and this was furthered in the second manifesto, *Confessio Fraternitatis* (*The Confession*) in 1615 which not only explicitly stated it was communicating 'by parables' but said Rosenkreuz's knowledge had been imparted on him by angels and spirits.

It cemented the esoteric order in the minds of many, and the fact that they were 'concealed from the average man' and able to 'provide insight into nature, the physical universe and the spiritual realm' helped to make them feel attractive. There was comfort in the belief that the movement heavily pre-dated contemporary times, even if it did not. Adding to the mystery was the claim that Brother Rosenkreuz was laid to rest in his own sanctuary in 1484, aged 106, a vault said to contain many treasures and held by an angel guard.

The claim that this was found in a perfectly dated preservation 120 years later in 1604 was

**Johann Valentin Andreae, who wrote *Chymical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreuz*, said Rosicrucianism was an object of fun**

of sorts to Christianity, not least in the division of the story into Seven Days, much like Genesis. There is also a nod to the Father of Lights—a phrase that appears in the book of James in the King James Bible along with nine Lords—and it is no coincidence there are nine books in the New Testament. So while Andreae said



The grave of Christian Rosenkreuz, depicted as the Philosophers' Mountain





to seek was Iudithum (an object of lust). However, the parts that contained some of Rosicrucianism were clear.

Robert Clynne, a former Supreme Grand Master of the Fraternitas Rosicruciana and author of *The Rosy Cross: Its Teachings* published in 1963, said the

*Fraternitas Rosicruciana* also combined many concepts and esoteric ideas, drawing upon symbolism and Pantheistic principles. Pantheism, pioneered aspects of the medical revolution of the Renaissance and

Rosicrucianism would study his *Prohemium*. Meanwhile, the Rosicrucian Michael Maier, who died in 1617, said "Our origins are

Egyptian and Samothrace, the Magi of Persia, the Pythagoreans and the Arabs."

Such deep inspiration and a revelatory world view won the movement many followers, and they numbered some high profile thinkers such as the English philosopher and scientist Francis Bacon (who some argue may also have been behind the manifestos of 1614 and 1615). Anyone who took the teachings on board would feel special and part of a select elite by the fact that they were hooking into something deemed revelatory. There is

an attraction in believing the Rosicrucians were operating invisibly and have the secret and power to put things right.

This concept is what is said to have led to the formation of the Invisibile College which became a precursor group to the Royal Society of London.

Rosicrucian principles deemed people to only create a utopian world populated by enlightened people spreading good and sharing

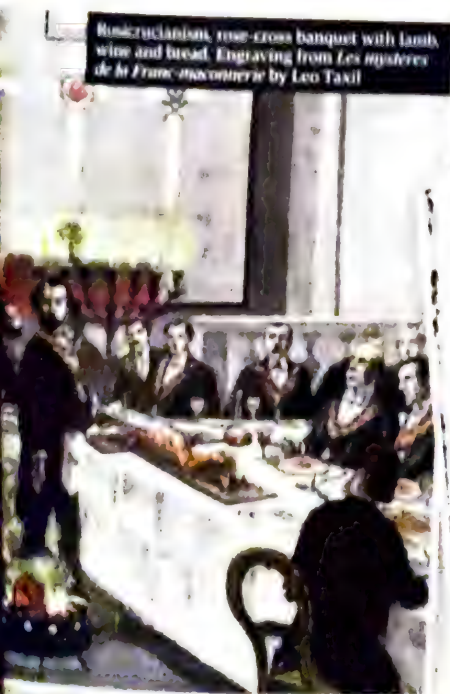
knowledge of the arts and natural sciences. The Invisibile College followed the teaching that knowledge can best be disseminated among learned men gathering in groups.

Freemasonry was said to be an outgrowth of Rosicrucianism. Indeed, the English essayist Thomas De Quincey believed the movement

influenced Freemasonry when it arrived in England. Prominent Rosicrucian Elias Ashmole joined the Freemasonry on 16 October 1646 and, in 1750, there was a reference to English Freemasons having copied some Rosicrucian ceremonies.

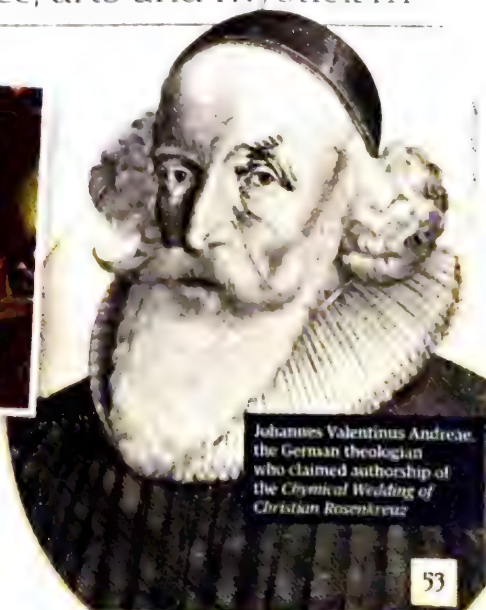
What this points to, however, is Rosicrucianism leading to secret societies rather than starting out as one. For while the story of Rosenkreuz makes claims of a brotherhood that met behind closed doors and remained hidden from society, it is more likely that Rosicrucianism formed in the early 17th century and that it did so very much out in the open, given that published work of that nature was difficult to keep under wraps.

**Maier's  
Silentium Post  
Clamores claimed  
Rosicrucianism to  
be drawn from an  
eternal philosophy  
underlying all  
religions**




"Rosicrucianism shed light on an ancient world order, blending science, arts and mysticism"

Warnung und General  
**REFORMATIO**  
der ganzen weiten Welt.  
Sind die  
**FAMA FR**  
TERNITATIS,  
Des öffentlichen Ordens  
Rosenkreuzes / an alle Welt  
und Häupter Europa gericht  
et.  
Auch einer kurzen RESPO  
von dem Herrn Rosenkreuzer selbst  
diesem von den Jesuiten in England  
gelesen / und auf eine Gallerie ge  
bracht.  
Ist öffentlich in Druck verfertigt  
von Johann v. Dornheim  
The first page of the *Fama Fraternitatis Rosae*  
Crucis which first told of Father C.R. aka  
Christian Rosenkreuz.  
Right: A symbolic representation of Christian  
Rosenkreuz, who most active was fictional.



Johannes Valentinus Andreae, the German theologian who claimed authorship of the *Chymical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreuz*.






Voodooists  
believe there are  
two worlds: the visible  
and the invisible, of  
the natural and the  
supernatural

An altar highlighting the African and European  
religious influences on Louisiana Voodoo.





# Origins of Louisiana voodoo

Louisiana voodoo is an offshoot from Haitian vodou, the older West African vodun, and is distinguished by its own set of specific innovations and rituals

Written by *Margot Conner*

**N**ew Orleans is an American city unlike any other. Famous for its cuisine, music and festivals, in the late-20th century it came to be known widely as 'the Big Easy', reflecting the locals' penchant for a good time and intruflled nature. But New Orleans' past as a center for the slave trade and its lurid associations with voodoo—many think it an evil cult—means the Crescent City (another nickname bestowed upon the place) boasts a darkness few other cities in the nation can match. Chicago and New York had their gangsters, Los Angeles its movie stars, but New Orleans boasted a secret world primed by supernatural energy, a land of voodoo kings and queens, people to be respected and sometimes

feared. A tormenting hex can be worse than a belly full of lead.

Almost everything we know about voodoo usually comes from films, and Hollywood has been very selective about which aspects of the religion to focus on, misrepresenting rites and rituals as something heathen and blasphemous, sometimes involving human sacrifice, satanic, black magic and—in the Haitian version—zombies, those brought back from the grave and forced to work on the plantations and do their master's bidding, their souls trapped, their bodies controlled by a wicked bokor. Voodoo as represented in the movies is tantamount to devil-worshipping. The secretive bayou setting, the rhythmic pounding of drums, the crackle

of torchlight, shadowed bodies swaying in blasphemous displays of demonic possession, led fevered imaginations to interpret these things as sacrilegious rites. In Christian minds, voodoo is satanic and closely associated with witchcraft, necromancy and other black arts. HP Lovecraft wrote in *The Call of Cthulhu* (1928), that the sinister cult at the center of his tale was "more diabolic than even the blackest of the African voodoo circles." Very often, voodoo's political and spiritual roots are ignored in favour of racist prejudice and plain ignorance.

As with Haitian vodou, Louisiana voodoo's roots lie in the grotesque slave trade and the African diaspora. Forcibly exiled from their homelands and treated as subhuman, they were



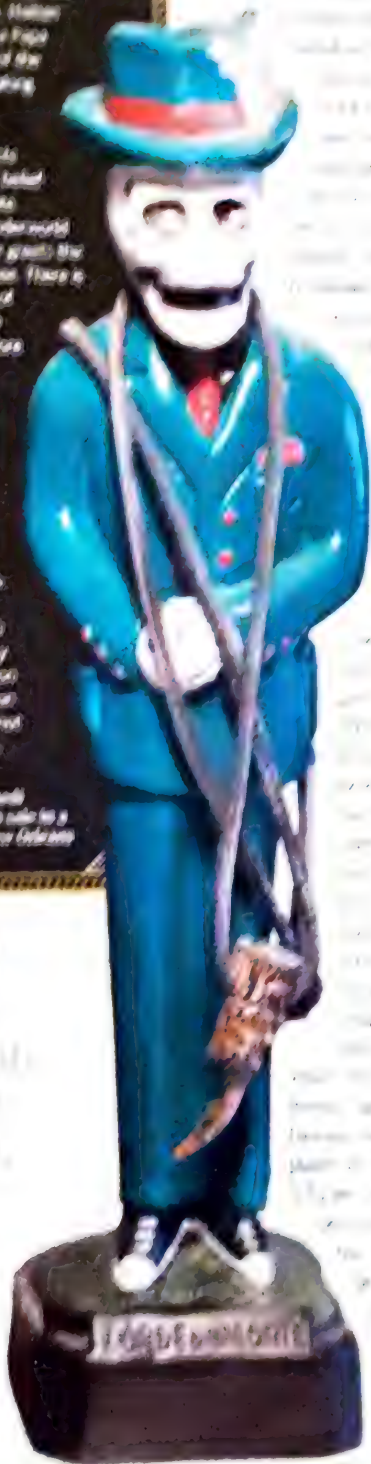
## Baron Samedi

Baron Samedi is one of the most popular of Vodou spirits, partly thanks to a character named Baron Samedi in the James Bond movies. As for Les Gens (1975), the film encouraged both the vital role he plays in the Vodou religion. He is the god of the dead, but he is also the god of the living, and always wearing black and sporting sunglasses. He is the god of the dead and the god of the living. He is the god of the dead and the god of the living. He is the god of the dead and the god of the living.

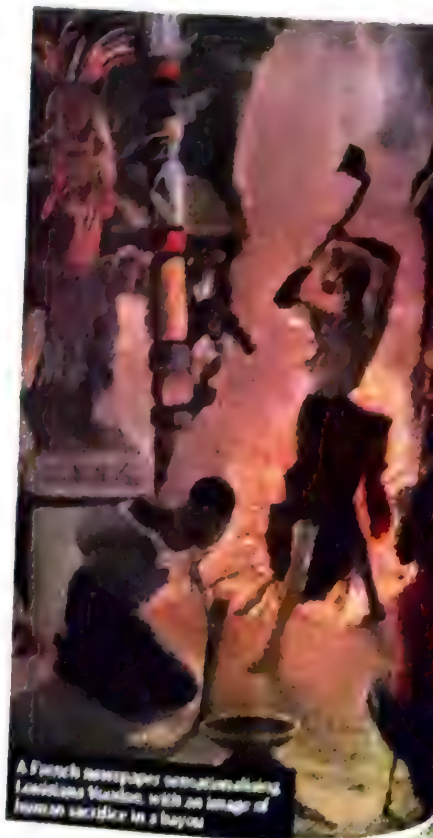
Samedi guards over the underworld and the souls of the dead. He grants the dead and takes them to heaven. There is no hell in Vodou, only a land of waiting souls (Gens). Samedi (Samedi) must pass through, before being reunited with their ancestors. Samedi is named after the French word for Saturday, as he is the god of the dead, being a bit of a trickster and a wing for spirits and other creatures. He is a trickster and a wing for spirits and other creatures. He is a trickster and a wing for spirits and other creatures.

Samedi is represented by a black figure, a kind of black figure, who has an association with the dead, though Samedi and Samedi are not represented in Vodou art.

Baron Samedi  
figure on sale in a shop in New Orleans



Iwa are contacted and consulted for advice by practitioners and worshippers who are seeking guidance in their lives



A French newspaper sensationalizes Louisiana Vodou, with an image of human sacrifice in a bayou



## Congo Square and voodoo

Early this century, Times Square had a voodoo temple. It was not typical of the city, but it was the only one of its kind. The temple was built by a group of voodoo practitioners who had come to New York from the Caribbean and the South. They had come to New York in search of a better life, and they had found it. They had found a place where they could practice their religion in peace and quiet. They had found a place where they could live and work together. They had found a place where they could be happy.

For a number of years, the temple was a place of peace and quiet. It was a place where people could go to practice their religion in peace and quiet. It was a place where people could live and work together. It was a place where people could be happy. But then, in 1901, the temple was destroyed. It was destroyed by a fire. The fire was started by a child who had been playing with matches. The fire spread quickly, and the temple was destroyed. The temple was a place of peace and quiet, but it was also a place of danger. It was a place where people could be hurt. It was a place where people could be killed. It was a place where people could be in danger.

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At a glance, voodoo looks to be diametrically opposed to forming any kinship with Roman Catholics. The cosmology of voodoo—with its myriad spirits (known as *loas* or *lwas*) seems totally at odds with Catholic teachings about heaven and hell, salvation or damnation. Vodun, Haitian vodou and, by extension, Louisiana voodoo is far more interested in a cyclical relationship between life and death, with a focus on metempsychosis (the transmigration of the soul). In Catholic tradition, possession by spirits

It is connected to associated with a natural power source, such as water deity, Yemaya

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Once cloaked in irony and shaped thousands of miles across the Atlantic, attempts were made by slaves to delineate people, by erasing them of individuality and freedom. Slave owners thought allowing voodoo to keep hold of their traditions and culture would possibly lead to rebellion and uprising. The development of voodoo into Haitian voodoo allowed slaves to take part in their heritage and culture.



To this day, Congo Square remains a focal point for African-American culture and celebration



...and the world of the living, the two systems of  
religion have passed comparable despite a notion of  
difference in the human. Lathadun, a priest in one  
of the temples, said that his role is to offer  
a service to the gods, to the Lathadun gods, so the  
people can come to the temple with no scriptures or  
books, and to lead a good, landestinely and  
spiritually way to the gods, relief and a prime source of  
protection against the forces of Vodun. Haitian vodou  
and the Lathadun vodou are essentially about healing  
and experiences of transcendence. The emphasis  
is on the integrating song and dance into  
the ceremony. The body is a medium and vessel for  
communicating with Iwas and the dead.

They spread and entered different territories. In the Caribbean islands, the coast of South America and elsewhere. As the variations in rituals and beliefs spread, the distinct regional offshoots to the main tradition in Haiti, creators such as Nzambi and Nana Buluku became Bondye (based on the French *Bon Dieu*, meaning good god) and the spirits became known as *lwas*, the spirits becoming a mythology involving warring nations and

figure. In CLAVE, the author's "familiar" figure of the "black" woman, when Haiti is not a province of Louisiana, transforming into voodoo. One piece of paraphernalia, above all others, was seized upon as an abomination with exclusively malevolent intentions, the voodoo doll.

There is a historical basis for the voodoo dolls' bad reputation, though one subsequently aggrandised. Associated with curses, manipulation and bad vibes, this totem springs from the Fon people of Benin and has been linked to Kongo's nkisi (plural: minkisi), which means "things which do things". Minkisi are containers housing spirits of the dead and can be used by the living for a host of reasons (including harming people). In Haitian voodoo, these figurines are known as pwen. Voodoo dolls became a prominent - if misunderstood - icon in Louisiana voodoo in large part due to the most famous voodoo queen of all, Marie Laveau, a devout Catholic and voodoo practitioner who helped the religion take some interesting turns.

As voodoo made landfall in North America  
Native American influences, European black magic

...and their function in the religion have been greatly abused by Hollywood movies.



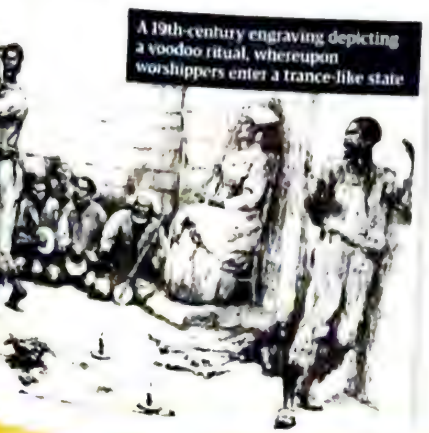
A window display in the famous French Quarter in New Orleans, showing the crass commercialisation of voodoo.



...the Bible to be the best available  
 grimoire (a book of spells)  
 for its followers.  
 ...and the practice  
 is founded in the  
 slave trade and  
 slaves' exposure to  
 Christianity. Hoodoo  
 doctors created their own  
 belief system from all sorts  
 of potions, foot-track magic, said  
 to harness the power of a person's  
 footprint by using dirt from the  
 track bottled up and buried, or hot  
 foot powder, sprinkled on a target's  
 doorstep and said to bring them bad  
 luck. Hoodoo was primarily practiced by Afro-  
 Americans, and is connected to and based on the  
 older voodoo.

Marie Laveau became a powerful and influential  
 figure in New Orleans, developing and promoting  
 the traditions into the wider community including  
 the white elites of society. She is responsible  
 for the boom in the voodoo doll, the  
 regions move into superstition,  
 the use of gris gris (a West  
 African Wolof word for a  
 talisman which brings the  
 water back and protects  
 them from harm), worship  
 of Le Grand Zombi (not to  
 be confused with zombies,  
 it's a snake god, the serpent  
 represents the spiritual balance  
 between genders, between sacred  
 knowledge and worship). The origin  
 of the name has been attributed to Marie  
 Laveau's python, Zombi, but there are arguments it  
 springs from the Bantu word, Nzambi, the serpent  
 deity. Either way, boa constrictors became part of  
 the mystique of Louisiana voodoo.

How many identify their religion as New  
 Orleans Louisiana voodoo today is in the  
 thousands at most, maybe two or three  
 per cent of citizens, and mostly centered  
 around the 7th ward. Away from the  
 tourist traps and sensationalist  
 movies, there remain those who take  
 voodoo seriously and respectfully.  
 The founding of the Voodoo  
 Spiritual Temple in 1990 served to  
 carry on the traditions handed down  
 showcasing the great spirituality at  
 the heart of voodoo and reclaimed  
 it from decades of misinformation  
 propaganda and lies.



A 19th-century engraving depicting a voodoo ritual, whereupon worshippers enter a trance-like state

## Marie Laveau became a powerful and influential figure in New Orleans

...the slave traders pioneered the practice...  
 reached the Caribbean as...  
 became involved in ritual...  
 known as Hougan, men and...  
 In Louisiana voodoo this transformed into the  
 kings and queens of voodoo, who became spiritual  
 priests and priestess of their religion, but people  
 to whom congregations looked for spells and  
 potions, as well as respected community leaders.  
 Doctor John (also known as Bayou John) was  
 another famous 19th century voodooist said to  
 have mentored Laveau. Both these historical figures  
 were renowned in their time and lived during New  
 Orleans voodoo's heyday- between 1820-1860.

John was a tattooed former slave and sailor  
 from Senegal whose powers involved resurrection  
 and healing. It is said he could heal those on the  
 verge of death. Born in 1937, Fred Staten moved  
 from Haiti to New Orleans and styled himself Papa  
 Midnite, crafting a stage routine which featured  
 him biting the heads off live chickens during  
 rituals, earning the sobriquet 'Chicken Man'. The  
 commercialisation of Haitian voodoo and Louisiana  
 voodoo ended up a racket preying upon  
 gullible folk and in New Orleans  
 has become primarily a must  
 experience thing for tourists.  
 Sales in mojos, gris gris  
 and charm bags known as  
 ouanga became a means of  
 easy money at extortionate  
 sums. It's a long time since  
 the controversial Marie Laveau  
 commanded huge audiences  
 in Congo Square or the shoreline  
 of Lake Pontchartrain, said to be in  
 their thousands.

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### Voodoo's musical influence

References to Louisiana voodoo and hoodoo appeared early on in blues tunes by Robert Johnson, a guitarist and singer said to have sold his soul at a crossroads. Yet it might be surprising to discover voodoo has influenced not just jazz and the blues, but everything from rock 'n' roll to heavy metal. Audiences screamed with delight and some were outraged, when Elvis Presley swayed his hips with abandon, or the times Jerry Lee Lewis smashed the keys of piano like he was possessed. In a way, they were very much possessed, by the rhythm of the beat and the energy conjured by music, giving in to the primal urge to let go and lose oneself to dance. Music theorists and anthropologists have noted voodoo's debt to 20th century pop, and the origin of the word 'rock'—as in rock music—itself is derived from the West African 'rak'.

Blues musicians such as Muddy Waters were influenced southern church groups, and this fed into the era of white boys taking the blues and transforming it into rock, with famed guitarists Eric Clapton, Keith Richards and others constantly name-checking the Deep South as its inspiration. Screamin' Jay Hawkins went one step further, by incorporating voodoo imagery into his act, and wrote a hoodoo-themed classic, *I Put a Spell on You*. We've voodoo to thank for rock stars going wild on stage and embracing the beat with a fervour with echoes of religiosity to it. The rock star is much like the voodoo king or queen leading the congregation.

Screamin' Jay Hawkins incorporated voodoo imagery into his live act





# Marie Laveau

## The voodoo queen

New Orleans' most famous daughter reigned over the city for decades, with both rich and poor seeking her mystic counsel

— — — — — Written by Martyn Conterio — — — — —

**M**arie Laveau wasn't just born in New Orleans, during the syncretic religion's heyday between the 1820s and 1860s, she was New Orleans. No other citizen in the port city's 300-year existence has so represented the unique and mysterious vibe of the town, nor gripped the public's imagination.

Although her biography is littered with contradictions and codswallop due to a lack of verifiable information, this has only served to keep the flame of Marie Laveau burning in the Big Easy. So much of her life story is wrapped up in legend, fabrication and the unknowable that even her birth year is disputed. Generally given as either 1794 or 1800, the *New York Times* 1881 obituary marked

her age at death as 98, meaning she must have been born way, way back in 1783 (10 September is recognized as Laveau's birthday).

The doyenne of voodoo is an important icon of the Crescent City. Her family tomb is visited by throngs of people led by tour guides, tributes are left at her gravesite and the reputed location of her ramshackle cottage at Rue St Ann, in the French Quarter, a humble abode built by early settlers from wood, is commemorated with a plaque. How Marie Laveau rose to prominence is a fascinating, albeit murky confluence of religion, race, class, society and power.

Born to a white man named Charles Laveau (a Creole plantation owner) and his mixed-race mistress, Marguerite Darcantel, said to be



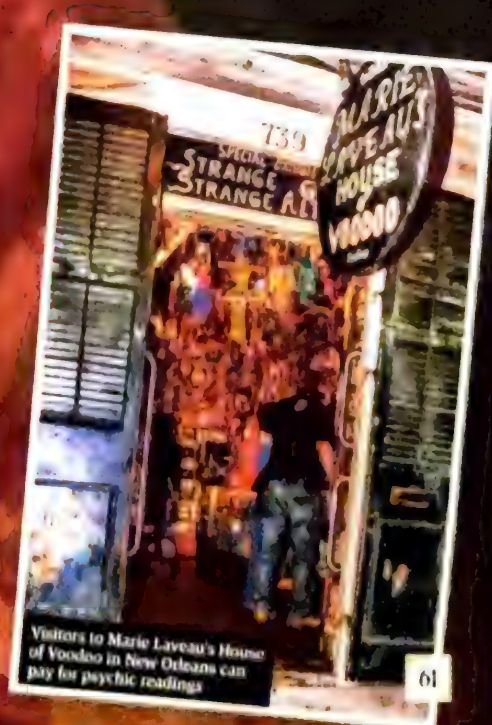
A 1920 painting of Marie Laveau  
properly based on an 18th portrait

## DEFINING MOMENT

### First association with voodoo

The first recorded instance of Marie Laveau and voodoo comes from a newspaper report about a complaint made to the courts regarding a raid on a voodoo ceremony and the taking by the police of a ceremonial statue. The report does highlight a connection between Laveau, voodoo and her position in New Orleans as a community leader and highly respected voodoo expert.

c1850









## DEFINING MOMENT

### The voodoo queen bows out

When Marie Laveau passed away in June 1881, the *New York Times* noted that she was a mystery even in her life: "Although Marie Laveau's history has been very much sought after, it has never been published. [...] The secrets of her life, however, could only be obtained by the old lady herself, but she would never tell the smallest part of what she knew."

1881

little secrets and where bodies were figuratively buried, gathering the information seemingly by a mixture of bullying servants with voodoo threats or plain old bribery. How she made gains from this

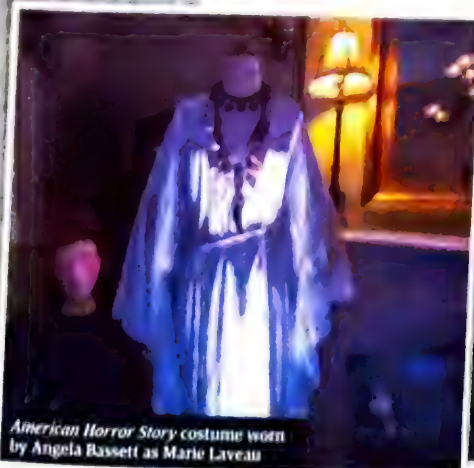
knowledge is unknown, as she lived her life in the hovel on Rue St Ann and was hardly living it up in one of the city's grand Spanish mansions.

The first recorded instance of Laveau's connection with voodoo occurred in 1850 when she and a fellow 'gens de couleur libre' named Rosine Dominique went to court to ask for the return of a statue confiscated during a ritual, one that had been raided by the law because there were concerns of freed people mixing with slaves away from Congo Square (the designated spot in the city where they were allowed to mingle on Sundays). The report is intriguing because it looks as if Laveau was serving as a go-between in the community. A fine was paid and the statue returned, though not to Laveau.

In 1859, she made the papers again in the city when a complaint was made describing her as a hag who was disturbing the peace with her voodoo rituals. As singing, dancing,

and other activities, she was said to be a "hag" who was "disturbing the peace" with her "voodoo rituals." However, voodoo was considered a "hag" and "hag" was a common term for a "hag" so these small acts of "hag" were a testament to Laveau's legacy as a "hag."

New Orleans writer Robert Tallant visits the tomb of Laveau



American Horror Story costume worn by Angela Bassett as Marie Laveau

Tributes left outside the tomb of Marie Laveau by worshippers





# Tarot

From the Chariot and the Hanged Man to Death, the Tower and the Devil, can you really play your cards right with the tarot?

Written by Peggy Jay Palmer



The legend of Tarot is a colorful story, involving the French, the Egyptians, the Gypsies, the occult, and the occult. It is a story that has been told for centuries, and it is a story that has been told in many different ways. The story of Tarot is a story of mystery, of magic, and of the human mind. It is a story that has been told in many different ways, and it is a story that has been told in many different ways. The story of Tarot is a story of mystery, of magic, and of the human mind. It is a story that has been told in many different ways, and it is a story that has been told in many different ways.

**Tarot cards first arrived in Europe in the bags of Islamic soldiers as they invaded Italy, Sicily and Spain in the 16th century**

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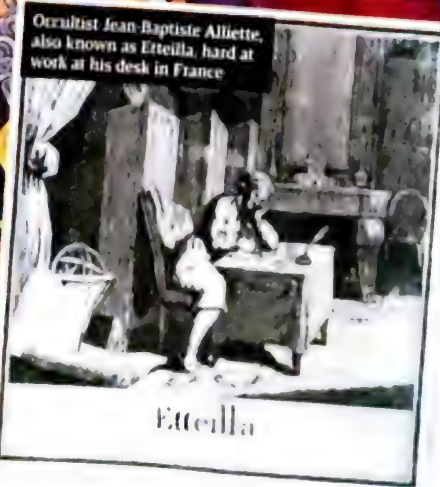




Many people believe that tarot diviners, commonly known as 'readers', can gain insight into the past, present and future.



The tarot equivalent to a joker card is known as the Fool and marks the beginning of a deck.




Occultist Jean-Baptiste Alliette, also known as Etteilla, hard at work at his desk in France.

Interpretations of the meaning of individual tarot cards are still disputed to this day.

Etteilla





During  
WWI, Welsh  
occultist Arthur  
Machen spawned the  
legend that phantom  
Agincourt bowmen  
fought at the Battle  
of Mons

Symbolist Belgian painter Kluyskens  
commissioned by the Académie, president  
of Ordre de la Rose + Croix

Alphonse Mucha incorporates  
the 12 Zodiac signs around  
the subject's head

A panel from Alphonse Mucha's illustrated *Le Pater*  
(Our Father), first published in 1899. Mucha reimagined  
the Lord's Prayer along occult lines, reinventing it as  
the individual's search for a divine state

Mucha



# The occult revival

As the lights dimmed on the 19th century, faith and progress broke like waves on the anxious, restless mood of the age. The dead reached out to the living, miracle cures were sought, and gurus gathered followers into secret societies

Written by James Hoare

The 19th century was a time of great change. A new scientific worldview was emerging, and the old religious beliefs were being challenged. The occult revival was a response to this crisis of faith.

Many people were seeking a new sense of purpose and meaning. The occult revival offered a way to connect with the spiritual world and to find a sense of belonging.

The occult revival was a movement that sought to revive the ancient mysteries and rituals. It was a time when people were looking for a way to connect with the spiritual world and to find a sense of belonging.

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## Spooks and charlatans

From the very beginnings of Spiritualism, some of its practitioners were being outed as frauds, who took advantage of the bereaved.

The movement began in rural New York with Margaret and Kate Fox, two sisters who in 1848 convinced their older sister their home was haunted by rapping the floor with an apple on a piece of string. They soon took what was effectively their cross act on the road with the help of some trusting Quakers who formed the core of the new Spiritualist movement.

Though the Fox sisters were outed and confessed in 1858, their dubious craft continued through countless others who used hidden accomplices, fake arms, or string to move objects, and double exposure to create haunting 'spirit photographs' that exposed spectral visitors where none had been previously visible.

The fraudulent Spiritualists had their opponents though and faced condemnation from some religious authorities, were subject to vigorous testing by the Society of Physical Research, and were dogged by the illusionist Harry Houdini, who recognized a perversion of his own craft at work.

Though he was an old friend of Arthur Conan Doyle, Houdini and Doyle began to trade blows in the press as Houdini campaigned to expose Spiritualists by touring a stage show in which he replicated their tricks.

Other mediums and seances continued to flourish, and new that would splinter Spiritualism into a host of sects and schools.

Most notable of these was the Theosophical Society, founded in 1875 by a Russian emigrant, spiritualist, and Helena Blavatsky. Forming a response to a fraudulent fake seance, Madame Blavatsky's faith became increasingly enthused by Hindu and Buddhist thought, and from the 1880s the Theosophical Society—which relocated its HQ to India—became fixated on attaining higher states of consciousness by following the esoteric learning of the Masters of the Ancient Wisdom who had been either helpfully reincarnated into the club's upper echelons.

The aggressive German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche explained his best writing in 1872's *The Birth of Tragedy*:

*What does our great historic hunger signify: our laughing about us for countless other cultures: our voracious desire for knowledge if not the loss of myth: the mythic realm: the mythic womb?*

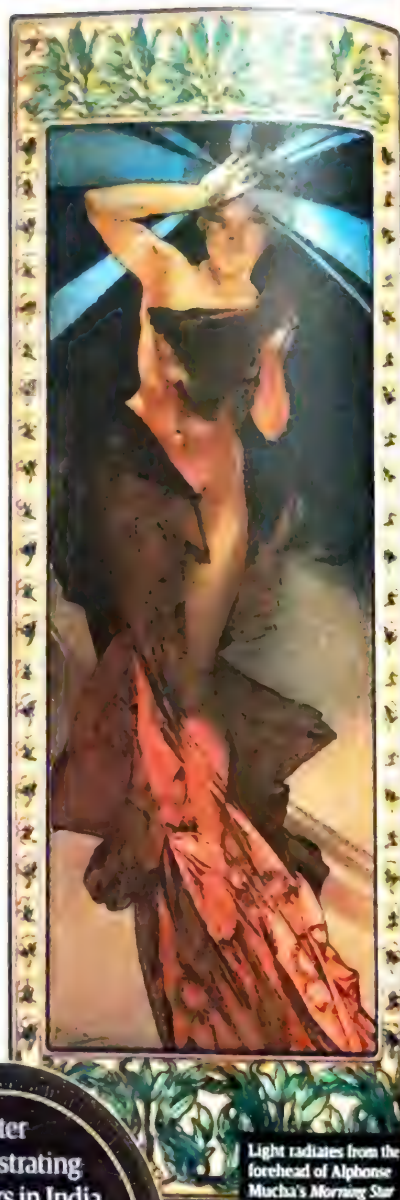
In the German-speaking world the search for a 'mythic world' was especially potent and the wildest, talkiest movement emerged in the early 1890s.

It sprang and morphed—thanks to the influence of Theosophy—into Armanism or Ariosophy in the 1890s. Austrian antiquarians Guido von List and Jörg Lanz von Liebenfels discovered there was a spiritual link between the Germanic people and their land, and the ancient Germans were a 'higher' and 'purer' race.

Before the arrival of 'wrong' influences like Christianity, industrialisation and democracy, as well as foreign races like Slavs and Jews.

This unique combination of elements, albeit with an Irish republican rather than virulently racist character, would emerge outside of Germany in the English occult poetry of WB Yeats, a rare romantic nationalist in London's occult ecosystem of glorified gentlemen's supper clubs, as well as his fellow Irishmen—the artist and poet George William 'AE'.

Harry Houdini pulls no punches in this 1909 poster for his medium busting stage show.



Light radiates from the forehead of Alphonse Mucha's *Morning Star*.

After demonstrating her powers in India, Helena Blavatsky was exposed as a fraud in 1885 by the Society for Psychical Research.

Russell, and the famous novelist Lord Dunsany.

"I often think I would not have this belief if I could," wrote Yeats in his 1903 pamphlet *Magical and Magical Evil*.

"for I have come to see it in the face of the world."

Imagine, in men and women, in houses, in handicrafts, in nearly all sights and sounds, a certain evil, a certain ugliness, that comes from the slow perishing through the centuries of a quality of mind that made this belief and its evidences common over the world.

In contrast to this nationalist primitivism, French occultism was largely a metropolitan affair, not much bothered by a retreat into wilderness.

**Do Spirits Return?**

**HOUDINI**

**SAYS NO - AND PROVES IT**

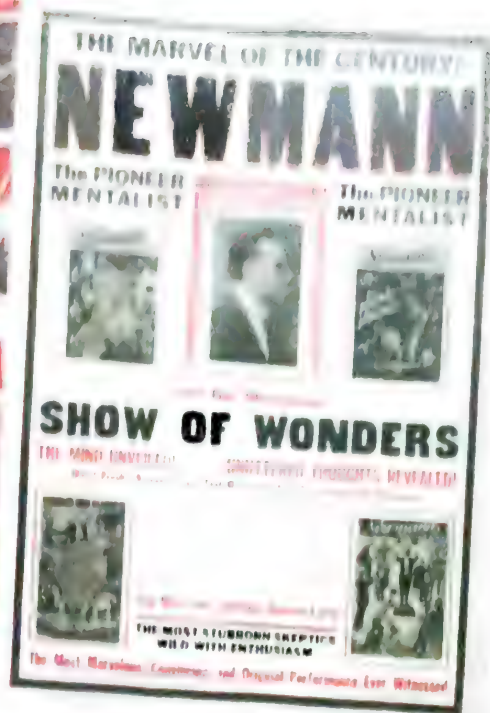
**3 SHOWS IN ONE**

**MAGIC-ILLUSIONS-ESCAPES-FRAUD MEDIUMS EXPOSED**

**LYCEUM THEATRE**

**68 HOURS: FRI. SAT. SEPT. 2.3.4**





cast a wary-eyed suspicion of the modern world. It was defined broadly by prayer and abstinence for those not quite ready to cut their strings to Mother Church and the decadent dances about town.

Symbolism was an art movement inspired by the writer Charles Baudelaire. He translated Edgar Allan Poe into French and sought to find through his work the *au delà*—the world beyond our own—with the routes available to this lusty hand being dreams, substance abuse, sex and the occult.

Among their number were artists Fernand Khnopff, Jan Toorop and Jean Delville, and writers André Gide, Stéphane Mallarmé, and Jules Karl Høyemans, a Benedictine lay brother turned mystical novelist. Over

the fence in Art Nouveau, the Paris-resident Czech artist Alphonse Mucha dabbled in theosophy and occultism, and conjured mythic, folklore figures in his stylized, dreamlike work.

Upset by the growing scepticism of the Society for Psychical Research, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle led a mass resignation

Catholic apostasy provided France with its most dramatic characters, often rooted in Martinism (a belief that man could return to the spiritual state of grace he had enjoyed in the Garden of Eden). Gnosticism (belief that the physical world is debased but man can ascend in spirit) or the Kabbalah (Jewish mysticism based on the power of the Hebrew alphabet and numerals), or all three.

These included the jailbird and former seminary student Eliphas Levi, credited as the father of modern occultism, and the flamboyant figure of Joséphin Péladan, who called himself *Le Roi*—the Babylonian title for king. Péladan was ostensibly a Martinist, but built bridges by resurrecting

## A New Dawn

the occult. The occult was a term used by the occultists to describe their own beliefs, which were a mix of theosophy, Kabbalah, and other occultic practices. The occultists were a group of people who were interested in the occult and who were trying to revive it.

The occultists were a group of people who were interested in the occult and who were trying to revive it. The occultists were a group of people who were interested in the occult and who were trying to revive it. The occultists were a group of people who were interested in the occult and who were trying to revive it.

Lineage was incredibly important to the occultists, but their influences were more recent and that's what made the Golden Dawn such a potent distillation of the entire occult revival to date. It liberally helped itself to elements of theosophy, cosmology, Kabbalah, alchemy, astrology, alchemy, astral travel and the tarot, and Byzantine Rosicrucian rites and initiations.

Unlike earlier orders, the focus of the Golden Dawn was on practical magic and ritual, and it found itself attracting the hungriest and most ambitious of occultists. These fiercely intelligent and competitive intellectuals thrived in the hierarchy of different ranks and levels, and especially Crowley, had a marvellous time pulling the society apart in 1903.



Kabbalist sigils from Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers' translation of the Renaissance grimoire *The Key of Solomon*



The *Sphinx* is Khnopff's best-known work and depicts Oedipus nestled next to the eponymous creature



"Magic didn't mean a retreat from Christianity, nor was it in opposition to scientific thinking."

Gotho van List expounded a modern Pagan new religious movement known as Wotanism.

The *Brotherhood of the Wand* as a modern secret society alongside the prominent occultists Stanislas de Guaita and Lucien Pease, and founded the *Salon de la Rose+Croix* for the Symbolists to exhibit their work and share their ideas.

A rather frail and scandal-prone figure, the leading lights of French occultism tended—eventually—to include de Guaita's hated Joseph Boullan, a defrocked priest and alleged Satanist who was rumored to have killed a child during a black mass and practiced spiritual healing through sexual intercourse.

When Boullan passed away in 1893, Joris-Karl Huysmans accused Guaita and Péladan of having killed him with black magic. Huysmans lashed out in a heavily fictionalized pulp

Queen Victoria and Abraham Lincoln both met with mediums in order to contact their deceased loved ones.

Mesmerism was a well established form of music hall entertainment.

**BARNUM HYPNOTIST**



Double exposure creates the illusion of a ghost hovering over an elderly couple.

expose *La Vie d'Henry Dumas* who took to using the image of Satanism rather than anything that occultists could do.

Just as magic didn't necessarily mean a retreat from Christianity, nor was it necessarily in opposition to scientific thinking. Instead the occult was another means to interpret a world that was only just beginning to be understood in any real kind of detail.

In a sense too, the growing confidence of the scientific worldview in tipping over the old certainties left what remained indescribable up for grabs by concepts that seemed just as esoteric to the layman as bacteria or electrons. Art movements love a good manifesto, and so the Belgian Symbolist Jean Delville spared few words in explaining his worldview in 1900: *New Mission in Art*.

*The occult sciences, the lofty teachings of theosophy and experimental 'spiritualism' are setting out to conquer the future, and on the threshold of a new age, are about to establish the science of the Ideal, that is the synthesis of science, religion and philosophy.* Some ideas cling so close to science that they still wear its cast-offs—pseudoscience or parapsychology—chief among them the doctrines of spiritualism and mesmerism.


Mesmerism wasn't just hypnotism by another name. This, after all, was the same one by which wandering holy man Grigori Rasputin claimed to be able to stem the internal bleeding of poor bloody Alexei, ill-fated heir to the Russian throne. It was based on the premise that all living beings were governed by magnetic forces. The word "mesmerism" takes its name from its inventor, the 18th century German physician

Péladan's *Le vice suprême* was interwoven with Rosicrucian and occult themes.









The Vedic  
Scriptures of  
Hinduism include a  
range of spirits, some of  
which could technically  
be classified  
as demons

Demons are often depicted in  
Christian art, like in this painting  
of Saint Francis by 17th-century  
artist Antonio Busca









Written by James Hoare

Levi's approach to magic found its home in Britain with the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and the writer AE Waite, a man who more than any other popularized the tarot and its interpretation in the English-speaking world. These are all associations that inspire shrill accusations of

The Abbe was soon relieved of his duties and the atmosphere turned hostile to those students who had fallen under his influence. The deflated Constant left St Nicholas for the seminary of





# DEFINING MOMENT

## A Christian radical

In 1841 Levi took *The Bible of Liberty* called for a more just society worthy of Christ's return. It was printed from the printers and he was sent to prison. He found himself deeply immersed in radical politics in a very unstable society. France After his failure to win a seat in the National Assembly, Levi became disillusioned with politics and dedicated himself to his occult research.

1841-1848

A 1992 portrait of Eliphas Levi by Gordon Wain



## The look of Black Magic

Although Lévi saw magic through a Christian lens, his work has done much to codify what it is we think of when we picture 'black magic'.

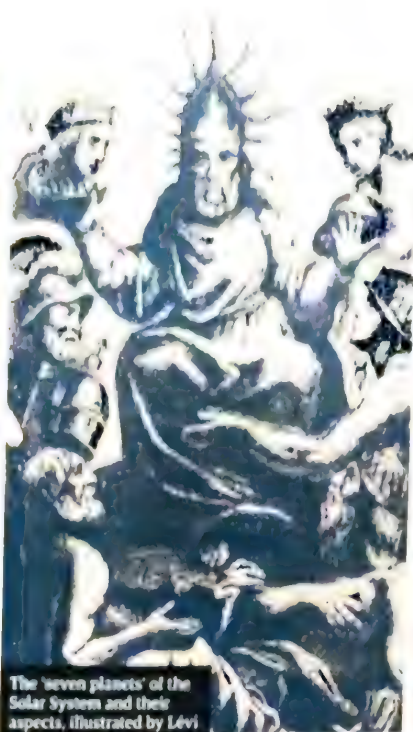
The idea of a point-up pentagram being 'good' and a point-down pentagram being 'bad' comes from Lévi and is now an established part of the iconography of occultism, Satanism and contemporary paganism.

Another diabolic legacy is the depiction of Baphomet as a goat-headed figure (also referred to as the Goat of Mendes). The deity supposedly worshipped by the Knights Templar was described in various ways under torture—a severed head, a head with three faces, a skull, and a cat head—but it was Lévi who illustrated the 'devil goat' for the first time in *Dogma and Ritual of High Magic*.

Lévi's Baphomet imagery became incredibly important to Aleister Crowley in the development of Thelema and influenced the Devil card in AE Waite's popular Rider-Waite tarot deck, firmly bedding it into the popular imagination. Perhaps its most famous big screen appearance is in the climax of 1968 Hammer horror film *The Devil Rides Out*.

Eliphas Lévi was also a significant influence on the writer HP Lovecraft at the time he was developing his 'Cthulhu Mythos', and Lovecraft refers to him directly in his 1927 short story 'The Case of Charles Dexter Ward', lifting an evocation straight from Waite's translation of *Dogma and Ritual*.

Eliphas Lévi's goat-headed Baphomet, from *Transcendental Magic: its Doctrine and Ritual*



The 'seven planets' of the Solar System and their aspects, illustrated by Lévi



Constant's birthplace in Paris's sixth arrondissement. His father was a shoemaker

in *Transcendental Magic*—far more than the 'dark and pernicious magic' of sorcerers. But at least he was a good sorcerer, because it was here that he first began to understand the contradictions within the occult: that achieving 'darkness' also wielded eternal damnation as a flail.

Now, it is hard to see it was at St Sulpice where Constant had his transcendental relationship with the High God and his intention to. According to Constant, the latter possibility was that he was entrusted with preparing for communion, and slowly they came to alter state. The innocent and open relationship affected his mind, and he began to feel a new kind of spiritual life. But two days later, when he was again in the church, he was found to have a new and more profound and intense relationship with the High God.

Constant took his new spiritual life to the streets of Paris, and he began to preach the new religion of the High God, which he called 'the religion of the High God'. He was soon arrested and taken to the police station. He was released, but the church to junk his new religion, and he was removed from the church. He was removed from the church, and he was removed from the church. He was removed from the church, and he was removed from the church.

The *Book of the Law* was published on 13 February 1904, and it was the first of a series of books that would follow.

before, and it was the first of a series of books that would follow. Constant was a member of the 'Society of the High God', and he was a member of the 'Society of the High God'. He was a member of the 'Society of the High God', and he was a member of the 'Society of the High God'.

Released in April 1842, Constant tried to keep his head above water, but he penned a few articles, but he was a member of the 'Society of the High God'. He was a member of the 'Society of the High God', and he was a member of the 'Society of the High God'.

Paris to take up employment under the name of 'Constantine', but the police were not so easily fooled. He was a member of the 'Society of the High God', and he was a member of the 'Society of the High God'.

## DEFINING MOMENT

### The father of the Occult Revival

Until his death in 1875, Lévi made his living through his writing and teaching. In 1854, Lévi visited London for the first time and the audience asked him to invoke the spirit of the ancient Greek magician Apollonius of Tyana—Spiritualism being the dominant occult art in Britain at the time. He was taken aback, but gave it a go.

1850s-1875

In the course of his life, Constantine was a member of the 'Society of the High God'.

Paris and Constantine to publish his religious and political writings, and he was a member of the 'Society of the High God'.

he claimed were inspired by visions. On 3 February 1904, Constantine was a member of the 'Society of the High God'.

and was charged with 'disturbing the order by provoking and inciting hatred between the several classes of society'.

In the end he only served six months, thanks to an appeal from his pregnant young wife, the sculptor Marie Noëmi Cadot. Over the rest of the decade following the February Revolution of 1904,





## DEFINING MOMENT

### *Dogma and Ritual in High Magic is published*

Levi's two-part treatise on ritual magic is regarded as a foundation stone in the 19th century occult revival, but unlike many of his contemporaries and followers it was based on fairly rigid scholarship. Levi dedicated his life to untangling the mysteries of the universe and reconciling them with his staunch Catholicism.

**1854-1856**

...elected for the French National Assembly, and failed to win a seat, he became increasingly disillusioned with politics and began to dedicate himself fully to spiritual matters.

Specifically he became enthused with kabbalah, a form of ancient Jewish mysticism. Christians now believe it dates from the 12th century, based around the idea that the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet and the numbers one to ten each hold specific power.

It is in the year his wife left him, Constant began publishing under the pseudonym Eliphas Levi. (although the Zed part was rarely used) which he asserted was the Hebrew translation of his birth name. In 1854 and 1855 the two volumes of his text *Dogma and Ritual of High Magic* were published.

After a constant the Christian revolutionary was gone, and in his place stood Eliphas Levi, the father of modern occultism. *Dogma and Ritual*

Levi's 'Year of the Microcosm' contains the the Tetragrammaton and the Hebrew name Adam, representing man as a reflection of God's power.



THE PENTAGRAM  
Yod of the Microcosm

...elemental (fire, water, air and earth) establishing the

...the ceremonial framework for his particular interpretation of the magical art.

To put it simply, if kabbalah was the secret language of the universe, then the tarot was the dictionary defining it.

Like the kabbalah, the tarot deck had 22 major arcana (the 'hero' cards such as The Fool, Death and The Hanged Man) and the suits of the minor arcana (such as the Three of Swords or Eight of Wands) were numbered one through ten.

1860's *The History of Magic* and 1861's *The Key to the Great Mysteries* developed those themes (which he repeated ad infinitum in later texts, rattled out at a plenteous rate). In them Levi reconciled accounts of sorcery, alchemy, and Biblical miracle into a single belief system that saw Jesus Christ stand alongside Renaissance alchemist and astrologer Paracelsus as magi, men who reshaped the world through magic.

Levi's work didn't catch on in France with anywhere near the fervour with which it was adopted in the English-speaking world. There it became part of the rich stew of cherry-picked superstition and pagan leftovers that informed the ritual magic of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and the belief in ancient mystical masters espoused by the Russian born emigre Madame Blavatsky and her Theosophical Society.

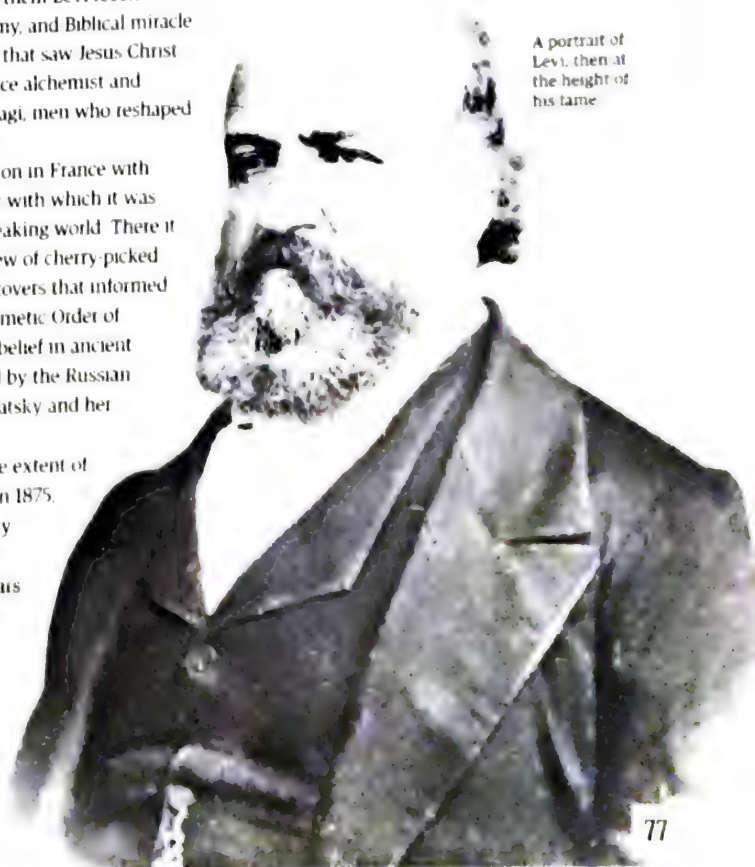
Levi didn't live to see the extent of his occult legacy. He died in 1875, three years before Blavatsky published *Isis Unveiled*, her first major work, and 12 years before three disillusioned Freemasons in smoking jackets gathered together to explore the mysteries of the universe, passing then wisdom on to

...would simply be a matter of the other

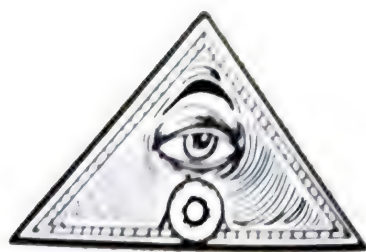
"Father, forgive them," said Jesus, 'for they know not what they do.' People of good sense whoever you may be, I will add, do not listen to them, for they know not what they say."

*The Great Secret or Occultism Unveiled* (1868)

A portrait of Levi, then at the height of his fame







# The magical life of Aleister Crowley

Mystic, philosopher, author, poet, controversialist, adventurer through the landscape of the mind—there were few taboos that the so-called 'wickedest man in the world' did not explore

— — — — — Written by Joel McIver — — — — —

If the late Aleister Crowley had been born in 1975 rather than 1875, his public antics as a magician, drug user and sexual experimenter would have been welcomed or at least tolerated in the modern world. In his own era, however, his keen interest in occult thought and practice, plus his deliberate attempt to gain infamy for its own sake, provoked rather than intrigued the public, and he was castigated as a serious threat. In reality, Crowley was simply an interesting, if unorthodox, man who loved the attention which his activities brought to him. There is no equivalent to him today, which makes the story of his life all the more compelling.

Much has been written about Crowley as an occult thinker and activist, and also about

his personal life. In fact, these two sides of his character are too deeply entwined for them to be meaningfully separated. From his earliest years, he found himself in conflict with his surroundings, and it's little wonder that he grew up to be a man profoundly at odds with the mores of his era.

Edward Crowley, as he was known until his late teens, was born at 80 Clarendon Square in Royal Leamington Spa, Warwickshire, to a family of comfortable means. His father, also Edward Crowley, owned a share in a successful brewing business, Crowley's Alton Ales, and had already retired by the time his son was born. Like his wife Emily, Edward senior was a member of the Exclusive Brethren, a faction of the better-known Plymouth Brethren, which was a Christian





Ceremonial garments were an integral part of Crowley's rituals, but they often caused people to dismiss him as a serious thinker



Abraham was a 14th-century Egyptian magician and the subject of study by Crowley's associate Samuel Mathers. He is said to have created the Abrahamic Ritual for Operations, in which a devout person can receive "knowledge and conversation of their Higher Guardian Angel". The ritual was originally intended to last a grueling 18 months, but Crowley adapted it to last a more manageable six. Fancy a crack at it? Here's how.

First, you need to be in good health, between 29 and 50 years old, and religious. It doesn't matter which religion you adhere to, you just need to acknowledge a god of some kind. You'll need two rooms, a prayer room and an adjoining bedroom, in which you will remain most of the time. For the first two months, spend the hours of daylight (yes, all of them) praying to your chosen deity, studying holy books and taking the occasional walk. For the second two months, include a day of fasting in each week.

Over the last two months, wear a special tunic, burn charcoal, build an altar and get ready for the big day. When it comes, anoint yourself in sacred oil, write Crowley's sacred texts on your altar, invoke the 12 Kings and Dukes of Hell—including Lucifer, Satan, Leviathan and Belial—and await your angelic visitor.

Translated by  
H. J. MacGregor-Morris

Samuel Mathers' *Book of the Sacred Magic of Abramelin* (1900), in which Mathers detailed the exhausting Abramelin Ritual



Crowley in the ceremonial garb of the Order of the Golden Dawn, an occult organisation

The presence of the group of 100,000 people and families at the event indicates the effectiveness of the education. The event was funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Science Foundation, and the National Geographic Society. The event was held at the University of California, Berkeley, and was the first of a series of events that will be held at other universities and museums. The event was a success and was well attended. The event was a great success and was well attended.

Unfortunately, he was not able to attend the 1997 meeting in Eastbourne. But Robert's involvement in the project during the festival, during a previous year, was great. As a fan of the Bible, he was an excellent example of the festival practice of mutual aid. I will always remember how he helped a young girl, who was shy, to apply to work with children at the festival. His help was absolutely essential to her. His spirit was gradually being spread to his friends, and it is a pleasure that some of his friends have gone on to become staff members here.

30, Clarendon Square in Leamington Spa, Warwickshire – Crowley's birthplace. The building indicates the wealth of his family



"Crowley rebelled by pointing out flaws in the Bible"



...a very actively cultivated poet...  
...saw that the whole system  
...were seen for Crowley's career of  
...ment activities to begin. Here was a  
...man barely more than a boy joined by his  
...a his friend (whom he later described  
...sincerely) repelled by over-  
...disciplinarians and contemptuous of revealed  
...As an intelligent, educated youth with  
...he was free—once he left the  
...at least—to wreak the worst kind of  
...could.

1895 Crowley adopted the first name Aleister  
...read in some book or other," he wrote, "that  
...the most favorable name for becoming famous  
...consisting of a dactyl (a long syllable  
...two short ones) followed by a spondee (two  
...long syllables) as at the end of a hexameter.  
...James Taylor Aleister Crowley fulfilled  
...visions and Aleister is  
...the Goetia form of Alexander  
...adopt it would satisfy my  
...romantic ideals."

In line with his new  
...Crowley developed  
...new interests—chess and  
...mountaineering among  
...them, both of which he  
...indulged after beginning  
...degree in philosophy at  
...Trinity College, Cambridge.  
...he also wrote poetry for student  
...newspapers such as *The Granta* and  
...switching his degree to English literature

In 1896, at the age of 21, he endured another  
...paradigm change. Before this point Crowley had  
...been just another regular, if rebellious, young  
...man—afterwards, he was a keen devotee of the  
...mystical world. It's thought that he enjoyed a  
...homosexual liaison while on holiday in Sweden,  
...although this was never confirmed. Whatever  
...the case, Crowley returned a changed man  
...apparently comfortable with being bisexual  
...at a time when this was generally deemed  
...abhorrent. He then struck up a relationship  
...with Herbert Charles Pollitt, the president  
...of the Cambridge University Footlights  
...Dramatic Club, and the two men were  
...couple for two years, eventually  
...breaking up when Crowley's  
...interest in Western esotericism  
...became all-consuming.

The final opportunity  
...for Crowley to pursue  
...his normal career came  
...and went in 1897 when  
...he travelled to Russia  
...in the employ of the

British secret service...  
...deterred Crowley from the idea of working  
...for a long time...  
...he was a man of independent means, and  
...he resolved to pursue his occult work...  
...1898 he abandoned his university studies...  
...bothering to sit his final exams, even though  
...his record indicated that he would probably  
...well if he had chosen to take them.

Where did all this unrest come from?  
...Perhaps Crowley's desire to be a poet (he  
...published several poems in 1898, some of  
...them of an erotic nature), possibly his new  
...interest in alchemy (he had met a chemist  
...Julian L. Baker, of similar views to his own), or  
...simply his occult readings.

Crowley in 1898, to the right of the portrait  
of 1898 is in the top right corner.



Crowley in magisterial  
mode in 1912. As the First  
World War approached,  
his activities began to  
adopt a political edge.

Some biographers  
suggest that Crowley  
remained a British  
Intelligence spy  
throughout his life





Crowley with his wife Rose and his second daughter Lola Zara, pictured in 1910

Crowley with his wife Rose and his second daughter Lola Zaza, pictured in 1910

1983). In 1984, Wrote *The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn* (1984) and in 1985 *The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn: The Original Version of the Esoteric Mystical Tradition* (1985), both of which influenced the work, profoundly. He took an important step in making the esotericism concrete by paying attention to the known as the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, which had been founded in 1888. He was introduced to the order by a woman who was later to be his wife.

Although Crowley was introduced to these influential people through the Order, it took Lord and Mathers, and a magician named Allan Bennett, who later shared Crowley's Hat Housebury Lane, his connection with the occult world, to be accepted by disapproval. While

The hexagram symbol of Thelema is unicursal, meaning that it can be drawn in a single line.

[illegible]

Although Crowley made peace with the more  
 canonic grades of the Order of the Temple, he was unpopular in the group thanks to the reputation he had gained from being a blasphemous  
 cybante, and he conflicted with member  
 the poet WB Yeats. The Order of London refused to allow him entry into its Second Grade, although Samuel Mathers did so after Crowley visited him in Paris. This caused a schism between Mathers and the Order, which became irreparable when Crowley, on Mathers's orders, attempted to storm and occupy the Order's temple building in Kensington. The case went to court, and the court won. Crowley and Mathers were expelled.

After stopovers in Japan and Hong Kong, Crowley reached Sri Lanka (then known as Ceylon), where he met Allan Bennett, who had moved there to study Shaivism; the latter decided to train as a Buddhist monk and went to Burma. Crowley chose to travel to India, studying raja yoga, a variant of Hindu astrology.

Later that year he settled in Paris where he gained a measure of local fame among the urban



As a published poet, occultist and a controversial sexual habits by the standards of the time, he was welcomed in fin de siècle London. He was friends with the painter Gerald Kelly and the author W. Somerset Maugham. Artistic and his extraordinarily vivid lifestyle made Crowley this year, making him one of the outstanding figures of his time—a view that was quick to endorse.

Another key moment in his personal evolution came in 1904. By then Crowley had returned to Boleskine House, married Gerald's sister Rose, and travelled with her to Cairo, where the couple claimed to be a prince and princess for their own arcane reasons. However, this was no simple pleasure trip. While in Cairo, Crowley underwent the most profound spiritual experience of his life.

On 18 March Rose—who had become delirious in a form of hallucinatory trance—told Crowley that the Egyptian god Horus was waiting for him. Two days later, she announced, "The Equinox of the Gods has come!" She took him to a nearby museum, containing a 7th-century BCE mortuary stele known as the Stele of Ankh-ef-en-Khonsu. The exhibit's number was 666.

On 9 and 10 April, for exactly one hour at noon on each day, Crowley—seated in his apartment—was addressed by a disembodied voice, identifying itself as Aiwass, the messenger of Horus. He claimed to have written down Aiwass' words verbatim, and soon after turned these words into a book, *Liber L vel Legis*, better known

## The intro

book. The resulting *The Book of the Law* was controversial at the time but became the foundation of a religion, Thelema, which Crowley went on to develop.

70 years after Crowley's death, the 'Do what thou wilt' credo, *The Book of the Law* and Thelema itself are still very much part of any conversation on the subject of alternative belief

systems. It's amazing to think that all

this work was essentially done by the time he reached the age of

30. Of course, he continued to work at developing and disseminating his beliefs, returning once more to Boleskine and becoming a father to his first child, a daughter. He and Rose saw fit to saddle the child with the name Nuit Ma Ahathoor Hecate

Sappho Jezebel Lilith Crowley,

referring to her as Lilith (after the Biblical demon) for convenience.

Although he was admired in occult quarters for his work, Crowley's life was rarely easy from this point on. He fell out with Mathers, claiming that his former colleague had sent an 'astral vampire' to attack him; his books, published through his own Society for the Propagation of Religious

Truth, never sold in large numbers; a failed expedition to climb Kanchenjunga in the Himalayas led to the deaths of many of the group; he was forced to leave India after shooting dead a man who tried to attack him; and

dropped into making these things an occult society.

## The claims of Crowley

Writing in *The London Sunday Express* last 7 June 1933, Crowley published some of his own claims. In the *Express*, he wrote: "Whether they have or not, I cannot say. There is no doubt, however, that of many of the most important and interesting reading material of the day."

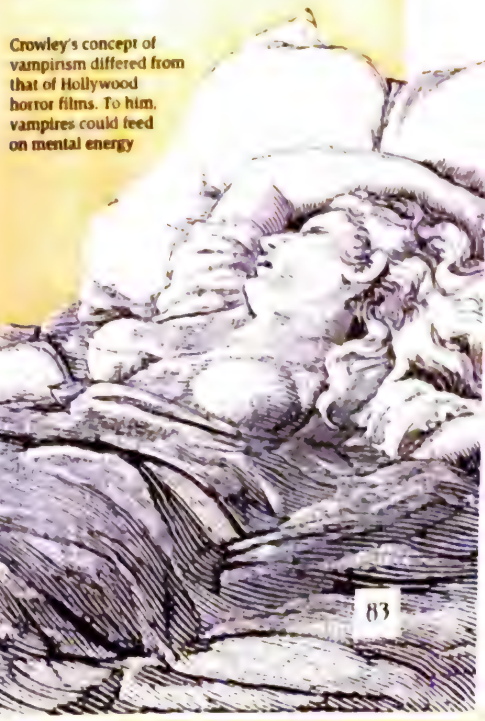
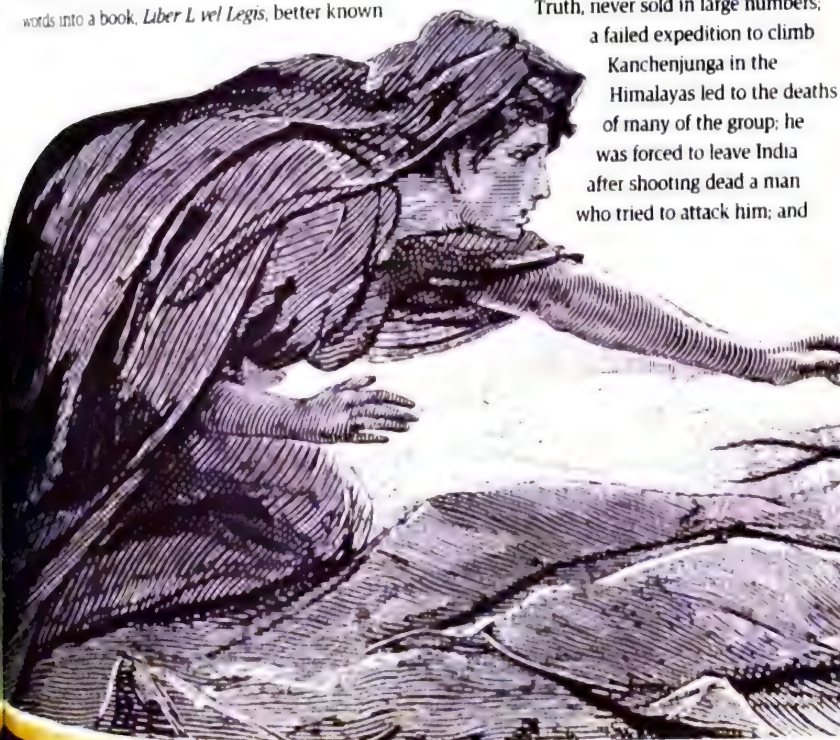
Crowley spent a lot of time discussing his recent attempts to make himself invisible—a feat that he claimed to have partly achieved. "I have been venturing out in public," he realized that he could not be seen. "I was able to walk out in a shawl and gold robe with a jeweled crown on my head without attracting any attention. They could not see me," he wrote.

Elsewhere, Crowley wrote of his falling out with his former colleague in the Order of the Golden Dawn, Samuel Mathers, in fantastical terms. In particular, he claimed that Mathers had sent an 'astral vampire' to attack him. "Vampirism in general was a subject that fascinated Crowley, but not of the familiar, Dracula style bloodsucking type. To him, vampires could be psychic in nature, feeding on mental energy. This rendered them difficult to combat, as well as impossible to see—perhaps usefully for the purposes of Crowley's propaganda.

Needless to say, few people took ideas his about vampires seriously, and of his attempts at invisibility, the *Manchester Guardian* dryly wrote in 1943, "Mr Crowley declines to make himself invisible in court."

Crowley's concept of vampirism differed from that of Hollywood horror films. To him, vampires could feed on mental energy.

The  
Kanchenjunga  
climb was conquered  
in 1955, 50 years  
after Crowley's own  
unsuccessful  
attempt





Edith sadly died at only two years old. Rose, by now suffering from alcoholism, bore a second daughter, Lola Zara, although Crowley embarked on numerous affairs before divorcing Rose in 1909.

Through all this, Crowley continued to attempt the Abramelin Operation, completing it at a hotel in Surrey. He claimed afterwards to have achieved a state of samadhi, or union with God, as well as conversing once more with his old chum Answas, and writing more Thelemic books as a result. Even supposing these supernatural liaisons were not fictional, they did nothing to help his finances, which were running out. He remained in a precarious financial state for the rest of his life, not helped by a growing addiction to cocaine.

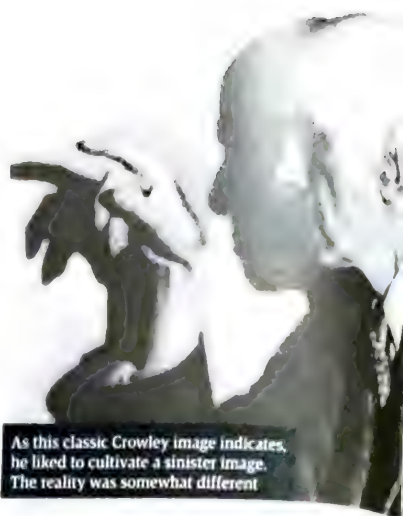
Still, nothing could stop him from defying the conventions of the time. His relationship with a

disciple, Victor Neuburg, was based on sadomasochism. While visiting Algeria, the pair engaged in a sex magic ritual on a mountain summit and invoked the demon Choronzon with a blood sacrifice. A vehicle was clearly required for his ongoing philosophy, and so he and George Cecil Jones founded the A.A., a group that infused the ideals of the Order of the Golden Dawn with Thelemic thought. The group's temple was located at 124 Victoria Street in London, where a biannual pamphlet, *The Equinox*, was published.

Crowley continued to write and publish into his middle years and beyond. In 1912 his *Book of Lies* gained some notoriety when Theodor Reuss, the head of yet another occult group, the German Ordo Tempus Occultus (OTO), accused Crowley of publishing some of the OTO's secrets. Crowley persuaded Reuss that he was innocent and the two

became friends, with Reuss later appointing Crowley as the head of the OTO's British branch, the Mystica Maxima. Hilariously, Crowley took upon himself the title of 'Baphomet, X' Supreme Rex and Sovereign Grand Master General of Ireland, Iona, and all the Britons.

From now on, Crowley appeared at regular intervals in the popular press, with



As this classic Crowley image indicates, he liked to cultivate a sinister image. The reality was somewhat different.

readers perceiving him as somewhere between a credible sorcerer and a clown. By 1914 he was broke and sold Boleskine House to move to New York, where he worked as a double agent for the British government with great efficacy—even persuading a German spy called Sylvester Viereck to give him a job on his newspaper, *The Fatherland*.

Thelema was always Crowley's primary focus throughout the decades, and after leaving the USA in 1919, he returned to London, where he was attacked by a tabloid called *John Bull*. Accused of being a traitor in its pages, Crowley chose not to sue the newspaper, although his status as an intelligence officer was by now common knowledge. He had bigger things on his mind—not least an addiction to heroin, which had been prescribed to treat his asthma.

Moving away from the toxic environment of London, he relocated to Cefalu on Sicily, Italy, to



Ass no questions: Crowley (and donkey) pictured on the former's first trip to the Himalayas in 1905.

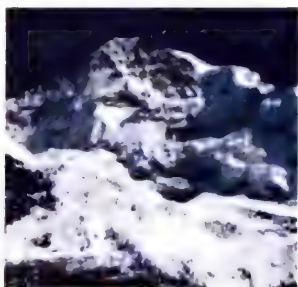
Pictures such as this one showed that Crowley liked to intimidate—but how much of it was pure theatre?



#### Death of Crowley's father

The senior Edward Crowley dies in 1887 of tongue cancer when his son is only 11. Crowley later defines this moment as a turning point in his life, not least because he inherits a large fortune.

1887



## Defining moment

1897

While at Cambridge, Crowley lives a dissipated life, exploring sexual liaisons with male and female partners. He also becomes an expert mountain climber, travelling to the Alps with his friend Oscar Eckenstein and making the first unguided ascent of the Mont Blanc peak. However, a previous and undefined mystical experience that he underwent in Stockholm in 1896 had set him on an esoterically spiritual path, and after a trip to Russia he suffers a short-lived period of illness. This leads Crowley to consider the reality of death and to dismiss all human endeavour as meaningless—and although a diplomatic career is beckoning, he determines to pursue his burgeoning interest in occult matters.

1875

#### Born in Leamington Spa, Warwickshire

Edward Alexander Crowley is born as the only child of Edward and Emily Crowley. His parents are members of the Exclusive Brethren, a Christian fundamentalist group.

12 October 1875

1895

#### Changes name to Aleister

Dissatisfied with the name Edward, Crowley adopts the name Aleister and goes up to Trinity College, Cambridge, to study philosophy. Later he switches to English literature.

1895

1898

#### Order of the Golden Dawn

Crowley is initiated into the Outer Order of the Golden Dawn by the Order's leader Samuel Mathers, later Crowley's close associate. He quickly progresses through the organisation's ranks.

18 November 1898

1899

#### Move to Boleskine House

Crowley styles himself as the laird of Boleskine after buying this imposing property on Loch Ness. The house becomes infamous and is purchased in 1970 by Led Zeppelin guitarist Jimmy Page.

1899

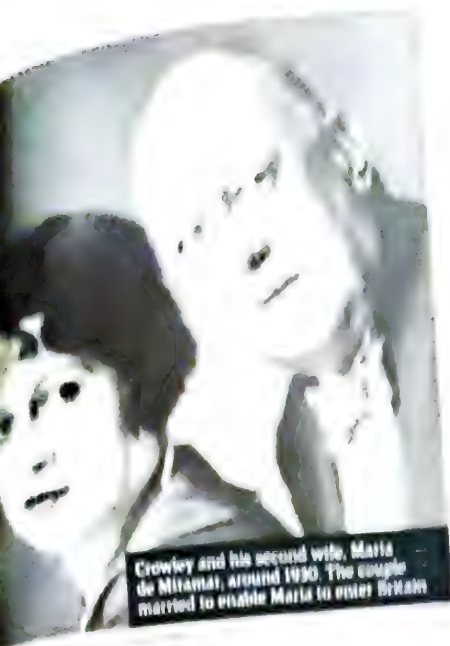
1900

#### A spiritual journey

Having visited Mexico, the USA, Japan, Hong Kong and Sri Lanka (then Ceylon), Crowley studies the Hindu practice of raja yoga. He claims to have achieved dhyana, or a state of perfect awareness.

1900





Crowley and his second wife, Maria de Mitrani, around 1930. The couple married to enable Maria to enter Britain



'The Great Beast' had a sense of humour, dressing up here as a Chinese god of laughter

## 1905: Death on the mountain

At the age of 35, Crowley is killed by a fall from a cliff while climbing in the Himalayas.

Crowley's death was a major event in the occult world, and his body was found by a British expedition led by Colonel Younghusband.

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## 1912: Defining moment

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## 1920: Defining moment

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While in Cairo where he and his wife Rose invoke ancient Egyptian deities and study, Crowley dictated a message to him over a period of three days. The voice of him to be known as the messenger of Ra, also known as the Great Beast, Crowley with a downy beard, appears and calls them into his book *The Book of the Law*. In the volume he writes that the human race is poised to enter a new world of existence and that it, prophetically and unequivocally, is made known. He defines the religion of the future and the book becomes the basis of his new religion, Thelema.



At the age of 35, Crowley is killed by a fall from a cliff while climbing in the Himalayas. Crowley's death was a major event in the occult world, and his body was found by a British expedition led by Colonel Younghusband.

1905

**Death on the mountain**  
Crowley, already 35, falls from a cliff while climbing in the Himalayas. But his team is frustrated by disagreement and the three retreat about a thousand feet. They discover that the man who is Crowley is dead.



A debonair portrait of the soon-to-be "wickedest man in the world", taken around 1905

1907

**Formation of the A A**  
Thinking away from the confines of the occult, Crowley co-founds the A A, where philosophy is merged with the occult. The group is called The Equinox.

November 1907

1911

**Fake death of Crowley**  
After a month of illness, Crowley fakes his own death. However, the secret is leaked, and Crowley is forced to return to London.

April 1911

1947

**Real death of Crowley**  
Crowley is found dead in his room, having been in the hospital for a long time. He is 51 years old.

11 November 1947



# Séances

Séances are widely seen as showmanship and hoaxes by many, but the origins of the practice are rooted in religion. Enter Spiritualism...

Written by Poppy-Jay Palmer

**T**he word 'séance' comes directly from the French 'séance', meaning 'seat' and 'session', from the Old French 'seoir', meaning 'to sit'. So if you are ever holding a séance and not all participants are sitting down, it's technically not a séance!

Séances were, and are, used as a method of contacting the spirit world and talking to those who are no longer with us. Proper séances can be traced back to the 3rd century, and even back then they were closely related to occult practices and brought fear to the hearts of non-believers. However, it wasn't until the 19th century that the popularity of séances began to balloon. That popularity came with the creation of the religion Spiritualism, with founding sisters Kate and Margaret Fox quickly becoming popular for holding public séances in New York with the aim of contacting the dead.

Over the years, five different types of séances have been developed: religious séances, which are used during services as a way of communicating with living personalities in the spirit world (Spiritualists like to refer to them as 'receiving messages'), stage mediumship séances, which are held on stage in front of paying audiences; leader-assisted séances, where a small group usually gathered around a table is led by a medium conducting it; informal social séances, which involve neither a leader nor any kind of religious context; and Spiritualist séances, during which a medium connects with the spirit world and all

People at a séance appear to experience a gaiter floating above their heads and a ghostly hand writing on paper. c.1887



People who attended séances include Robert Owen, former prime minister William Lyon Mackenzie King, and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle



present participants interact and speak with the personalities they believe they have summoned. Some of the most famous séances of that particular era include those of First Lady Mary Todd Lincoln, who organized several sessions in the White House while grieving the loss of her son. They were extremely high profile, and were

attended by her husband President Abraham Lincoln as well as a number of other prominent members of US society.

Scientists, sceptics and atheists have always had more than their doubts. The art of the séance took a massive blow in 1867 with the Seybert Commission and its investigation into a number

of respected Spiritualist mediums. Their report decried them as frauds and showmen. Outside of slumber parties, séances are still being used as part of the religious services of Spiritualists, Spiritist, and Spiritism churches to this day, but they usually place more emphasis on the spiritual aspect than on the showmanship.

The idea of contacting the dead was often mocked in illustrations by satirists, like this one in humour magazine *Fliegende Blätter*, 1907

"Séances were, and are, used as a method of contacting the spirit world"

Séances gained popularity with the introduction of Spiritualism, a religion founded by Kate and Margaret Fox

Photographers used to charge séance-goers to have their picture taken with the ghost of a loved one

The séance of Mary Todd Lincoln, during which she tried to contact her son, became one of the most notorious ever held









# Hitler and the occult

The runes, rituals and star signs behind the rise and fall of the Third Reich

Written by James Hoare

**T**he Nazis were desperate," intones John Hurt's Professor Bruttenholm in Guillermo del Toro's 2004 dark fantasy film and comic adaptation, *Hellboy*.

"Combining science and black magic, they intended to upset the balance of the war."

From the box office to bookshelves, the image of Nazi Germany being in league with black magic and old gods is ubiquitous. Though best characterized by the retro pulp of the *Indiana Jones* film series where the adventurous archaeologist races to keep relics from the pursuing jackboots, it's a far more long-lived trope than you might think.

A handful of early texts advanced the theory during the early days of World War II. *Hitler Speaks* (1939) by Hermann Rauschning, *Occult Causes of the Present War* (1940) by Lewis Spence and *Hitler et les Forces Occultes* (*Hitler at the Occult Forces*, 1939) by Edouard Saby all portrayed the Führer as a man driven by the demonic forces he could barely contain to one degree or another.

None of these writers had any exclusive insider knowledge of the inner workings of the Nazi

Party. Rauschning leveraged his credibility as a former middle-ranking Nazi to greatly embellish his contact and conversations with Hitler. Spence was a Scottish folklorist and writer who projected his own occult knowledge onto the mystical manifestos of Hitler's fellow travellers. Saby was even further gone, seeing evidence of occult hand gestures in the Führer's photographs and equating vegetarianism with Satanism.

Facts that thin soon gave way to fiction and Dennis Wheatley wrote the supernatural thriller *Strange Conflict* in 1941, which told of Nazi witch doctors menacing the Atlantic convoys from South America. The Stephen King of his day, Wheatley rubbed velvet shoulders with English occultists such as Aleister Crowley and Montague Summers, and spent the war working for the London Controlling Section, a part of the byzantine British intelligence apparatus concerned with elaborate deception campaigns.

After the war ended, Wheatley's novels *They Used Dark Forces* (1964) and *Gateway to Hell* (1970) helped to keep the concept in the public imagination, leading to the first *Indiana Jones* movie, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), and from

that into an endless parade of Nazi zombie movies and credulous cable shows exploring the Third Reich's myriad magical mysteries.

Why these stories endured then and why they endure now is largely the same. In 1939-40, the seemingly unstoppable advance of Nazi Germany as it rolled over its neighbours was difficult to understand without recourse to dark powers. In the aftermath of World War II, the horrific scale of the Holocaust, the devastation of aerial bombardment and the savagery of occupation defied easy understanding. Again, many took comfort in the belief that this wasn't the work of people just like themselves, but of monsters whose dark appetites drove them to seek out forbidden lore.

At its heart, though, is a kernel of truth and interest in the esoteric was surprisingly widespread in Nazi Germany. While the idea of a gimlet-eyed Führer driven by occult obsessions is absolute rubbish, the occult was indelibly bound up with Nazi Germany. It was a low hum of astrology, superstition, runes and mythology that underpinned 12 years in which the swastika fluttered above Berlin.



## The twilight of reason

## The spiritualists and secret societies at the birth of the Nazis

Across Europe and North America the turn of the century represented the flowering of superstitious thought. This was the product of spiritual anxiety—people felt lost in this unstable new world and nowhere was this more obvious than in Germany.

Hot on the heels of their seemingly incomprehensible defeat in World War I came the economic mismanagement and political instability of the Weimar Republic, bringing with it running street battles between far left and far right, and hyperinflation – an unnecessary head start for the race to the bottom that was the Great Depression. What granted this febrile atmosphere a uniquely dangerous quality was the burgeoning relationship

between nationalism, anti-Semitism and supernatural superstitions

Still a new country with myriad dialects and regional identities, significant Slavic and Jewish minorities and a volatile confessional faultline between the Protestant north and the Catholic south, Germany had only become unified under one flag in 1871, while Austria remained part of the 'German world' but not a part of the country itself. In short, the question of what it was to be 'a German' hadn't really been resolved.

The soundtrack to this combative nationalism was undoubtedly Richard Wagner. In 1869, the first part of what would become his epic *Der Ring des*

"To be German you had to be descended from this pre-industrial pagan idyll that their cherry-picking of history had contrived"

NSDAP propaganda from 1932 depicts Communism as a supernatural foe

*Nibelungen (The Ring of the Nibelung)* was staged in Munich. Conceived as a break from the Italian-style operas of his earlier career, Wagner created a new shared mythology out of pre-Christian Norse and Germanic folktales. Although widely admired, amid these thunderous chords was plenty that the emerging German far right could embrace: a heroic masculine ideal overcoming duplicitous foes, spiritual purity versus greedy materialism, and sheer bloody righteousness.

Another spiritual bonding agent for this fractured nation was the volkisch movement that emerged over the 19th century, emphasising the spiritual purity of German peasant life and folklore that had become corrupted by urbanisation and Christianity. For volkisch thinkers, theirs was an exclusive creed: Blut und Boden (Blood and Soil). German soil and German blood were linked, and to be German you had to be descended from this pre-industrial pagan idyll that their cherry-picking of history had contrived.

In 1903, the hoary Austrian occultist Guido von List (and his acolyte Jörg Lanz von Liebenfels) popularized a new theory that bound this sense of longing and bubbling hatred into a potent new form: Ariosophy, or Armanism. An active contributor to volkisch journals on the subject of ancient runes (he created the 18-letter Armanen Futharkh later used by the SS) and his own Odin-worshipping cult, List believed that all the great figures in history and legend were Aryans whose golden age had been ended by the onset of inferior races and cultures.

List and Liebenfels identified Atlantis—an object of particular fascination for 19th-century occultists—with the mythical North Atlantic island civilisation of Thule, postulating that the ancient Aryans had been scattered from there following a catastrophic flood, with the purest bloodlines of this spiritual Aryan super race settling in Germany and the Himalayas.

Now German meant Aryan, and those of insufficient 'Aryan blood'—Jews and Slavs, for example—were seen as an existential threat to the *völk*. Purely by existing, *völkisch* fanatics believed that these 'lesser races' were poisoning the sacred union of their ancient culture and land. This broiling stew of heroic mythology that followed Wagner, the imagined pagan past and virulent racism of the *völkisch* movement, and myriad other occult fascinations that bloomed in this hothouse of unreason—from numerology and astrology to dowsing rods and homeopathy—were the engine that drove a significant chunk of the German right. Crucially, these strands of thought electrified many who would go on to take their place by Hitler's side following his seizure of power in 1933.





# DIE WOCHE



The sword in Hitler's hand on this cover of German newspaper Die Woche hints to Wagner's operas



Many high-ranking members of the Nazi Party believed in the idea of Blut und Boden: 'Blood and Soil'



Hitler and Goebbels called for rural values and the preserving of farming communities



A pagan shrine in Germany for those following the Norse gods

Legions, Fuhrer Rudolf Hess and the notorious general of occupied Poland, Hans Frank were both members of the Thule Society, which grew out of the obscure volkisch Germanenorden (German Order) and Reichshammerbund (Reich Hammer Association). Frustrated by their lack of electoral success, the Thule Society entrusted right-wing journalist Karl Harter with the task of hearing their hateful creed of its occult ties and taking it to the working class. The result was the Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (German Worker's Party), co-founded in 1919 by Harter and Dietrich Eckart.

As the DAP transitioned to the NSDAP (Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei, or the National Socialist German Worker's Party) in 1925 under charismatic new frontman and Eckart protégé Adolf Hitler, they broke their links with the Thule Society and booted out Harter, having drawn away members, support and even the official newspaper, *Völkischer Beobachter* (People's Observer) from their one-time sponsors.

Minister of Food Richard Walther Darré, Army branch commandant Paul von Hinderburg (Hitler Youth) leader Baldur von

Schirach and Reichsführer SS Heinrich Himmler all met in the extreme volkisch Artaman League, which formed in 1923. The Artaman preached a retreat from cities and Christianity, and into farmsteads and solstice festivals. They looked to Eastern Europe for "German soil" to "reclaim" and violently opposed the Slavic presence in Germany's ethnically mixed eastern borderlands. Like the Thule Society, the League was soon swallowed up by the rise of NSDAP and by 1927, an estimated 80 per cent of their membership had joined Hitler.

While in the grand scheme of Weimar Germany's tempestuous political scene the likes of the Thule Society and the Artaman League were little more than racist social clubs for middle-class dilettantes, the NSDAP was a mass movement that spoke to the fears of the German working class. It promised jobs, stability, economic good times, victory over enemies within and without and a new world on their own terms. It may have been couched in the rhetoric of good versus evil, destiny and the volk—describing Jewish people in the terminology of the vampire and Hitler

in the language of the saviour—but these were subordinate to political realities.

Hitler himself had very little contact with the occult fringes of the German far right and, indeed, esoteric sects began to be shut down from 1933 and the more outspoken activists—"volkisch wandering scholars", in Hitler's own words—were silenced.

For the Fuhrer, the supernatural was a prop, a way of encapsulating and manipulating that desire for something better, stronger, more self-assured that many ordinary Germans felt at the time. He embraced the imagery of Wagner, seeing himself as his heroic protagonist Siegfried—and identified with the archetype of the "magician" or the "prophet"—but these were costumes to be worn on the political stage.

Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung best encapsulated the supernatural aura of Hitler's presentation, saying in 1942: "He is the loudspeaker which magnifies the inaudible whispers of the German soul until they can be heard by the German's consciousness [...]. Hitler's power is not political; it is magic."



# Fortune tellers & the Third Reich

Nazi Germany never really settled on an official position when it came to astrology, and that started right at the top

## The dream quest of Rudolf Hess

Pushed to the fringes of the Third Reich and anxious about the coming war with the Soviet Union, Hess set upon the idea of a desperate peace mission to Britain that would put him back in the Führer's good graces.

With his astrologer Ernst Schulte Strathaus having advised him of the optimum departure date for a mission of peace, on 10 May 1941—just over a month before the start of Operation Barbarossa—Hess set off alone on a night flight to Scotland in his personal Messerschmitt Bf 110. Crash landing and taken into custody, British intelligence quickly realized that not only were Hess' pleas for peace a cheque that couldn't be cashed, but the Deputy Führer himself wasn't entirely stable. Over the long incarceration that followed, Hess raged that his food was been poisoned, attempted suicide and admitted that the idea for his flight had come to him in a dream.

Back in Berlin, Hitler was furious. Egged on by Bormann and Rosenberg, who blamed the advice of astrologers for this betrayal, Hitler authorised the 'Hess Action'. On 9 June 1941, Heydrich began a mass round-up of astrologers, psychics and faith healers. Hundreds were arrested, thousands of occult books seized and Schulte Strathaus disappeared into a concentration camp for two years.

Much to the frustration of Rosenberg, Heydrich put the focus on re-education, a relatively benign response given the wanton terror that the Gestapo had visited on the other ideological enemies of the Reich. Many of those interned were eventually released. Either Heydrich had given up pushing against Himmler's indulgence of the supernatural, or, with the impending war in the east, he simply felt the resources of the Reich Main Security Office were better spent elsewhere.



DEPUTY FÜHRER  
(1933-41)

One of Hitler's most devoted early followers, Hess became increasingly marginalized and outmanoeuvred by more accomplished political big beasts, including his own secretary. The Deputy Führer allegedly used a pendulum to decide whether letters were sent by allies or enemies, and regularly solicited advice from astrologers.

The most prolific patron of occultists in Nazi Germany, Himmler relied upon his personal astrologer Wilhelm Wulff so heavily towards the end of the war that Walter Schellenberg, chief of SD-Ausland (foreign intelligence), found it easier to seek orders from the "court magician" than the "king".



REICHSFÜHRER-SS  
(1929-45)



## The stars are our secret weapon

With secret British innovations such as radar, sonar and Bletchley Park codebreaking turning the tables on the German U-boat menace in the Atlantic, the German Navy was at a loss to explain this reversal of fortunes. Inevitably, superstition flourished in ignorance and, at the suggestion of U-boat captain Hans Roeder, the MND (Marine Nachrichten Dienst, Naval Intelligence Service) authorised the establishment of the Pendulum Institute in Berlin.

Roeder's rogues gallery included the likes of Karl Kraft, briefly released from prison for the job, astrologer Wilhelm Wulff and dowser Ludwig Straniak. This was the first officially sanctioned use of authentic astrology in the Third Reich (Goebbels wasn't genuinely soliciting horoscopes, after all), but it wouldn't be the last. When the navy eventually lost patience in the Pendulum Institute, many of its beneficiaries found work with the SS. Wulff in particular would claim to be at the heart of an unlikely tale: Operation Mars.

By August 1943, Benito Mussolini had been overthrown and imprisoned by the Italian government, who were looking for an early exit from the war. Retrieving the deposed dictator was of paramount importance to keeping fascist Italy fighting and so Himmler ordered around 40 astrologers, diviners and dowzers to be released from concentration camps and put to work in a villa conjuring the defeated dictator's whereabouts. Their prize would be freedom plus a million Reichsmarks, but swapping the cruel camp regime for Himmler's luxurious pile was more than enough.

Eventually, though, Mussolini was located and retrieved in a daring mission led by the infamous Otto Skorzeny on 12 September 1943. Himmler was overjoyed with the tremendous success of Operation Mars and, although the intelligence gathering behind the successful operation was very much the traditional kind, nobody had it in them to convince him otherwise.

WILHELM WULF  
ZODIAC and  
SWASTIKA



BELIEVERS



11/11/11  
11/11/11  
11/11/11



1. The first step is to identify the problem. This involves understanding the current situation and what needs to be changed.

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1. The first part of the document is a list of names and dates, which appears to be a record of some kind. The names are written in a cursive script, and the dates are in a more formal, printed style. The names are: "John A. Smith", "John B. Smith", "John C. Smith", "John D. Smith", "John E. Smith", "John F. Smith", "John G. Smith", "John H. Smith", "John I. Smith", "John J. Smith", "John K. Smith", "John L. Smith", "John M. Smith", "John N. Smith", "John O. Smith", "John P. Smith", "John Q. Smith", "John R. Smith", "John S. Smith", "John T. Smith", "John U. Smith", "John V. Smith", "John W. Smith", "John X. Smith", "John Y. Smith", "John Z. Smith". The dates are: "1880", "1881", "1882", "1883", "1884", "1885", "1886", "1887", "1888", "1889", "1890", "1891", "1892", "1893", "1894", "1895", "1896", "1897", "1898", "1899", "1900", "1901", "1902", "1903", "1904", "1905", "1906", "1907", "1908", "1909", "1910", "1911", "1912", "1913", "1914", "1915", "1916", "1917", "1918", "1919", "1920", "1921", "1922", "1923", "1924", "1925", "1926", "1927", "1928", "1929", "1930", "1931", "1932", "1933", "1934", "1935", "1936", "1937", "1938", "1939", "1940", "1941", "1942", "1943", "1944", "1945", "1946", "1947", "1948", "1949", "1950", "1951", "1952", "1953", "1954", "1955", "1956", "1957", "1958", "1959", "1960", "1961", "1962", "1963", "1964", "1965", "1966", "1967", "1968", "1969", "1970", "1971", "1972", "1973", "1974", "1975", "1976", "1977", "1978", "1979", "1980", "1981", "1982", "1983", "1984", "1985", "1986", "1987", "1988", "1989", "1990", "1991", "1992", "1993", "1994", "1995", "1996", "1997", "1998", "1999", "2000", "2001", "2002", 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Gradually his delight, writing thanksgiving of the freedom that his work was ordering in France, for Wolff's will seemed to be broken by the gross technological brutality, and also unwilling to test the line and compromise on his capt. as he did it. He resigned, although his work continued to be printed regardless of his desires, and finally some of these prisoners produced hundreds of books, pamphlets and radio broadcasts until 1943, widely consumed that the British public were so shocked by atrocity as they German concentration.

Get from under the protection of the Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda. Kraft fell firmly back under the coverhorns of the Gestapo and, unable to keep his mouth shut about the Third Reich's chances as the stars aligned them to him, he was picked up as the Nazi Action: In and out of prison and concentration camps for the rest of the war. Kraft eventually died of typhus on 6 January 1945 while in a limo on his way to Buchenwald.



# The dark culture of the SS

Himmler's state-within-a-state was filled with outlandish occultists and projects

Heinrich Himmler's political upbringing in the esoteric Artaman League permeated his many endeavours. Once he was handed control of the Schutzstaffel (Protection Squad) responsible for the security of the party's elite in 1929, he set about transforming the SS from bloody knuckled Weimar-era street brawlers into a militant order inspired by the Teutonic Knights who brought Germanic sword and fire to the dark forests and mountains of the Baltic.

While most of Himmler's occult predilections initially played out behind closed doors, in one way at least it was worn on his sleeve. SS insignia from the infamous double lightning flash to the emblems of various units and formations, came from Guido von List's runic alphabet.

As wider German society became steadily hostile to the more maverick mystics, Himmler welcomed them with open arms and set them to work. The Ahnenerbe—more properly the Forschungs- und Lehrgemeinschaft das Ahnenerbe (Ancestral Research and Teaching Society)—was formed under a different name in 1935, before being gradually absorbed into the SS.

Concerned with research into the mythic origins of Aryans and recovering or recreating their knowledge, the Ahnenerbe ballooned into a vast apparatus with departments covering research areas as niche as Hausmarken und Sippenzeichen (House Brands and Family Marks), Wortenforschung (Dwelling Mound Research), Indogermanische Rechtsgeschichte (Indogermanic

Historical jurisprudence) and Volksart. Marchen und Sagen (Folklore, Fairy Tales and Myths). Unsurprisingly, its manager Walther Sievers was a veteran of the Hittite League.

Perhaps its most serious endeavour, though, was the 1938-39 expedition, led by a finding trip into the spiritual shared heritage of the other 'pure' Aryan culture to have survived the catastrophic sinking of Atlantis/Thule. The square-jawed Bear Grylls of Nazi Germany, Ernst Schäfer, consulted Himmler's mystic mentor Karl Maria Wiligut before his departure. He left convinced that Wiligut had read his mind using techniques only known to the Tibetan lama.

The expedition was a masterpiece in confirmation bias as Schäfer's team—who held a

## ICELAND (1938)

Linguist Bruno Schweizer led an expedition looking for shrunes to Odin and Thor. He found the Icelandic government uncooperative and complained to Himmler that the Icelandic people had abandoned their traditional crafts and legends.

## FINLAND (1936)

Finnish anthropologist Yrjö von Grotenhuis led a joint German-Finnish voyage through the remote region of Lapland to record the chants of witches.

## CANARY ISLANDS (1939)

Historian Herman Wirth thought vintage portraits of Canary Islanders with blonde hair made the island a possible contender for Thule. The trip was called off when war was declared.

## BOLIVIA (1939)

Another expedition rained by war: an archaeologist Edmund Kiss believed the ruined temples of the Andes were similar to European structures, suggesting that they were the work of ancient Aryans.

## ANTARCTICA (1938-39)

Fuel for conspiracy theorists, the Ahnenerbe were sent to the remote German-claimed New Swabia to drop swastika flags against a Norwegian claim.

## The Rasputin of the Reich

By Himmler's side from late 1933 to his retirement in summer 1939, aged 72, was Karl Maria Wiligut. A one-time Austrian asylum patient, although the SS kept records of his mental health tightly under wraps lest they expose their boss to ridicule, Wiligut claimed direct descent from a line of prehistoric German sages created by a coupling of Asen (air) and Wanen (water) gods—the Aesir and Vanir in Norse mythology.

Along with the ancient rites he had inherited from his father and his father's father, Wiligut boasted of a "clairvoyant memory" that allowed him to channel ancestral wisdom. In one particularly lurid incident, he was driving with Himmler when suddenly he began to fit. Foaming at the mouth, he lurched from the car and into a nearby field. Lucid again, Wiligut announced that this was a site sacred to the ancient Germans.





## Lucifers Hofgesind

## Raider of the lost grail

A passionate historian of Medieval grail lore often referred to as the "real Indiana Jones", Otto Rahn was lured into the SS inner circle by Wiegand on the strength of his widely read 1933 book *Kreuzzug gegen den Gral* (*Crusade Towards the Grail*), which spread the idea that the 13th-century Cathar heresy was in fact the remnants of a Germanic pagan cult.

Rahn was particularly taken with accounts of three Cathar knights slipping over the walls of the doomed Montségur Castle with the Holy Grail—the cup used to catch the blood of Christ at his crucifixion, believed by Rahn to be a pre-Christian relic that fell from the sky—hidden in a sack and travelled to the Languedoc region of southern France to explore the subterranean passages used by the Cathars.

Himmler loved Rahn's work so much he committed it to memory and signed off a 1,000-Reichsmark a month stipend for Rahn to work on his next book. Rahn took on SS rank and uniform to better ingratiate himself with his new patrons. As an openly gay man he should have been on his guard, but his obsession with finding the Holy Grail blinded him to all else. Only when his sequel

*Lucifers Hofgesind* (*Lucifer's Court*) appeared in 1937 with anti-Semitic passages crudely inserted by another hand, did Rahn perhaps realize the monster that his efforts were feeding. Himmler, for his part, was delighted with *Lucifer's Court*, which linked the Cathar heresy to wider witchcraft cults through the figure of Lucifer—the Devil—here a pagan bringer of light demonized by the Christian Church, and ordered 5,000 copies bound in leather to be presented to the Nazi elite. Hitler was even given one for his birthday.

Punished for a drunken scrape with a three-month tour of duty on the staff of Dachau concentration camp, Rahn was horrified by what he saw and naively tried to resign his commission. Rumours of his sexuality and possible Jewish heritage were beginning to make the rounds.

While stories vary on the exact chain of events, some say his resignation was refused and a solution that better suited the Reichsführer-SS was proposed. Either way, in March 1939, 34-year-old Rahn climbed a snow-covered slope in Austria's Tyrol mountains and was found dead the following morning, his lifeless eyes staring out across the serene landscape.

winter solstice rite when they arrived—returned laden down with artifacts and holy books. Unwinded of the shared Aryan heritage of National Socialism and the Tibetan Buddhism.

So pleased was Himmler with the scope and scale of his organisation's output that he presented Hitler with a set of leather-bound volumes recording the great Ahnenerbe discoveries on his 50th birthday.

Despite the all-consuming growth of Ahnenerbe, Himmler's voracious hunger for occultish knowledge also led to the eye-catching Hexen-Sonderauftrag (Special Assignment—Witches), or H-Sonderkommando (H-Special unit), which ultimately found itself concerned with cataloging lore and artifacts relating to witch trials and hunts.

They managed to fill a detailed library of reference cards—the Hexenkartothek—with accounts of lusty Germanic pagans facing off against the feeble-minded Church. Despite having some overlapping areas of interest, they avoided being absorbed by the Ahnenerbe by 'discovering' that Himmler was a direct descendent of Margareth Himmler, a woman who was burnt alive as a witch in 1625.

It's important to remember that this seemingly ridiculous obsession with chronicling an imagined past of magical rituals and storybook heroes was part of an ideology of unrivalled venom and intent. Himmler's genocidal campaign in the wake of Operation Barbarossa—cleansing the east of Jews, Roma and Slavs, communists and a bloody swathe of the Slavic population in preparation for German

colonists—was a dark dream drawn from his days in the Artaman League. As custodians of Aryan superiority whose work fed the ideological engine that drove the Holocaust, the Ahnenerbe found themselves on the front line.

Archaeologist Hans Schleif was given custody of Ahnenerbe's activities in occupied Poland, plundering Polish treasures from the Warsaw Archaeological Museum and looting Jewish homes in the country. The anthropologist from the Tibet expedition, Bruno Beger, procured skeletons for racial categorisation, selecting an estimated 100 prisoners from concentration camps for murder and study. Finally, folklorist Alfred Karasek took control of the resettlement of Germans in Ukraine and ultimately became an active participant in mass murder and population clearance.

"As custodians of Aryan superiority whose work fed the ideological engine that drove the Holocaust, the Ahnenerbe found themselves on the frontline"



The SS lead a solstice festival in Berlin



Ernst Schäfer during the Tibetan expedition



# Himmler's Nazi Camelot

Inside Wewelsburg castle, the SS's monument to mysticism

With the SS increasingly retreating into a world of its own, distinct even from the collective madness of the Third Reich, Himmler hit upon the 17th-century Wewelsburg Castle in Westphalia as the perfect inner sanctum for his unholy order.

The castle was soon appropriated for the ideological indoctrination of the SS Race and Settlement Office in 1934 under the esoteric influence of Willigut Himmler. He began to envisage it as a tribute to Henry the Fowler, a 10th-century German ruler reimagined by Wagner in his opera *Lohengrin* as the first great pan-Germanic hero, uniting the nation against the Hungarians. Himmler believed himself to be the reincarnation of Henry.

While Himmler's lieutenants held pseudo-pagan rites, celebrating weddings and solstices alike in an imagined Germanic tradition, millions of Reichsmarks were sunk into renovating the castle. A concentration camp was opened nearby to provide a labour force and the Ahnenerbe became glorified interior designers as rooms were named after great German rulers and filled with related artwork, artifacts and armour, stolen and bought.

The castle's two showstopping features were testament to Himmler's mythic pretensions: a pseudo-Arthurian round table for the SS elite and a vast hall, the floor adorned with a jagged 'black sun' that glorified in the deeds of dead SS-Gruppenführer (SS-group leaders), who would be

ritualistically cremated and stored in one of many urns in the vault below.

Similarly, the personalized SS Ehrenring (SS honor rings, also called Totenkopfring, or death's head rings), designed to signal membership of the inner circle of Himmler's order, were returned here for storage upon the owner's death, creating an eternal brotherhood linked in death as they were in life by the twisted ideals of the genocidal Schutzstaffel.

Plans compiled across 1940 and 1942, set aside as the tide of war turned against the Third Reich, provide for the entire relocation of the nearby village and a vast complex spilling out over half a mile on a wheel of towers and curtain walls.

In 1945, as the US Army advanced, Himmler ordered Wewelsburg to be razed rather than see his sacred temple profaned. In the end, it was only partly destroyed but damaged enough to inspire mystery and invite questions that cannot be easily answered. Wewelsburg became a subject of fascination in the 1970s, a Nazi 'Camelot' of occult mysteries and secretive rituals.

"Millions of Reichsmarks were sunk into renovating and redecorating the castle"

## The Black Sun

Now nearly as potent in its toxicity as the swastika, the black sun wasn't widely used by the Third Reich, appearing only on the floor of Wewelsburg's 'hall of heroes'. Composed of a sunwheel—one of the traditional symbols of Germanic paganism—and 12 single sig runes radiating outwards, the black sun was an astrological body whose power, according to Himmler's occult mentor, Karl Maria Willigut, could be harnessed through yoga.

## Honor among thieves

Designed by Willigut and initially presented only to senior officers, the SS Ehrenring was a personal gift from Himmler and signified the bearer's membership of an elite within the SS. It was to be worn on the left hand ring finger and returned upon death, dismissal or retirement.

## Oak leaves

A feature on older Prussian military decorations, oak leaves symbolised regeneration and were incorporated into the Knight's Cross medal and onto gravestones during the Third Reich to displace Christian imagery.

## Sig rune

A single lightning bolt in a triangle, symbolising victory from which we get the Nazi salute 'Sieg Heil' or 'Heil Victory'.

## All that glitters

As well as being silver, SS Ehrenring are rare. According to rumour, the castle's stock of honor rings—around 9,280—were sealed in a nearby cave with dynamite, capturing the imagination of treasure hunters for over half a century.

## Inscription

The recipient's name, Himmler's signature and the date it was awarded were engraved on the interior of the ring.

## Totenkopf rune

The death's head of the SS, symbolising, of course, death or valour in the face of death. Like the oak leaves, it was also used by the Prussian army.





## Weird War II

Some of the most headline-grabbing projects attributed to the Nazis are simply nonsense

### SECRET MAP TO THE GRAIL SEIZED

Hitler's henchmen loot the Ghent Altarpiece

Hubert and Jan van Eyck's 15th-century *Adoration of the Mystic Lamb*, often referred to as the Ghent Altarpiece for its pride of place at Ghent Cathedral, is one of the most important pieces of Christian artwork in Europe and Hitler had to have it. One key panel shows a lamb bleeding into the Holy Grail, signifying the elaborate polyptych's true role—

a secret map to the sacred vessel. Hitler's interest in the Ghent Altarpiece was political as well as artistic. Aside from being a work he hugely admired, it was one of the artworks returned to Belgium in the

Treaty of Versailles and he felt it rightfully belonged to the Reich.



## World News

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### THE DEVIL INSIDE DER FÜHRER

Adolf Hitler's evil inspired by demonic possession

Surely acts that murderous could only come from Lucifer himself? Former far-right politician Hermann Rauschning's 1939 biography of the Führer paints a troubling portrait of a man plagued by demonic voices. Hitler himself underlined "He who does not have the demonic seed within himself will never give birth to a magical world" in his personal copy of Ernst

Schertel's *Magic, History, Theory and Practice*.

Rauschning embellished his contact with Hitler considerably, publishing his book to meet the growing interest in Germany's new master. As for the "demon seed" Hitler's enthusiasm for Schertel was purely symbolic—a magician was someone who changed the world through sheer force of will.

### UNHOLY HITLER WIELDS HOLY LANCE

It pierced the side of Christ and led Adolf to victory

The fabled Spear of Longinus, reputed to have pierced the side of Christ at the Crucifixion, was seized from Vienna's treasury by the Nazis during the Anschluss. Hitler used its otherworldly powers, harnessed by the great German warrior kings of the past, to steamroller most of Europe.

The story surfaced in a 1972 book by Trevor Ravenscroft, who claimed to have studied under Austrian occultist and Grail writer Walter Stein. It later transpired the two had never met and Ravenscroft contacted Stein after his death in a séance. Meanwhile, Vienna's Habsburg Spear dates from the 7th century CE—well after its cameo in the New Testament.



### MAGICIAN MENTORS A MONSTER

Aleister Crowley fed the Führer hallucinogens and taught him everything he knew



Crowley's magical *Book of the Law* was translated into German in 1925, catching the eye of Adolf Hitler. Translator Martha Kuntzel observed the similarities between the text and Hitler's own declaration of dark faith. *Mein Kampf*. Crowley tried to contact Hitler around 1936 to induct him into Thelema and he annotated a copy of Kuntzel's 1939 book *Hitler Speaks* with the commonalities.

In reality, this bromance was all rather one-sided. There's no evidence that Hitler was aware of Crowley's writings, and by the time *The Book of the Law* was released in Germany, the future Führer's worldview was firmly established.



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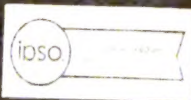
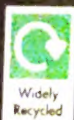
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